



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823

F829b

v.1

W. S. Reed

S. Univ 1936

BORDERLAND:

A COUNTRY-TOWN CHRONICLE.

BY

JESSIE FOTHERGILL,

AUTHOR OF "THE FIRST VIOLIN," "KITH AND KIN," "PROBATION,"
"THE WELLFIELDS," AND "HEALEY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1886.

(All rights reserved.)

823
F829b
v.1

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER	PAGE
IN CHILDHOOD	I
I. OTHO'S RETURN	19
II. MAGDALEN—AND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD	45
III. LANGSTROTH'S FOLLY	66
IV. THE FACULTY OF CLOSE OBSERVATION	85
V. GILBERT'S CAUTIOUSNESS	102
VI. GILBERT'S "COUP DE THEATRE"	113
VII. MICHAEL, ROGER, GILBERT	142
VIII. THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE WISDOM OF GILBERT	168
IX. THE GODDESS OF THE TENDER FEET	186
X. THE PROCESS OF ANNEALING	203
XI. OTHO'S LETTER-BAG	217
XII. ELEANOR	242
XIII. TWENTY-EIGHT AND TWENTY-TWO	265
XIV. THRUST AND PARRY	275

4 Jan 52 Roorda

Genesee Ray 308657 Budget 307

BORDERLAND.



IN CHILDHOOD.

ONE summer, which in point of date now lies many years behind us, four boys used to play together, and to quarrel and make it up again with one another—to live together through the long, golden days, that vivid, eager life peculiar to children, in a curious, old-fashioned garden on the bank of the river Tees, and on the Durham side of that stream. The garden belonged to a great house, not very old, though it was the abode of an old family, solemn, not to say gloomy, in its dulness and stateliness of appearance, and standing out in

rather sombre contrast to the woods which were behind it, and the terraces which sloped down from its front to the river-side. The name of the house was Thorsgarth ; many a spot hereabouts bore some name reminiscent of long-past Danish occupation and Scandinavian paganism. It was a characteristic giving a peculiar flavour to the language and nomenclature of the whole country-side, and one, too, which has been sweetly sung by at least one of our English poets. With this fact, these four particular boys were probably unacquainted, and it is more than probable that if they had known all about it they would have cared less than nothing for the circumstance. What could it matter to them that, a little further down the stream, that sweet spot where they loved to wade in the shallows, and not far from which noisy Greta came tumbling and laughing into the arms of sedater Tees—where the numerous wasps' nests were to be found

under the bank, to destroy which nests they had gone through such delicious toils and perils, and where on sunny days the trout would lurk in the pools amongst the big boulders,—what could it matter to them that this scene had been immortalized by both poet and painter? To them it was all their own paradise; the presence of an artist would have vexed and incommoded them. There they kicked, jumped, splashed, and generally misconducted themselves in the sweet solitude and the generous sunshine of that far-back summer, without a thought of its being hallowed ground. Three of them were not of an age at which the ordinary boy is given to appreciate poetry. As for the eldest of them, if he ever did read it, he kept the fact to himself.

These four boys were all the sons of gentlemen, in the conventional sense of the term—albeit their fathers were men of widely different calibre, as regarded not

only worldly, but also mental and moral characteristics.

The eldest and the third in age were brothers, Michael and Gilbert Langstroth. Their father's was one of the oldest families in the neighbourhood, and had been one of the richest, although many people had begun to say that not much was now practically left to him except the old house itself, the Red Gables, which stood in genial vicinity to many other houses, both great and small, in the great cobble-stoned, slanting square, which formed the west-end of Bradstane town.

Michael Langstroth at this period was twelve years old, a noble boy to look at, tall and broad, with a dark face, and a sweet, rather rare smile. There was a good deal of unconscious pride in his manner and bearing. Perhaps his piercing gray eyes, going with this dark complexion, might really betoken that Norse descent in which his family gloried. All his actions

were, so far as one could judge, in harmony with his outer appearance ; without fuss or ostentation, but all partaking of the intrinsically splendid, generous, and lavish. Even at this early time of their lives, the other boys knew that Michael hated lies with an intensity which showed itself more in sudden, violent action than in words. They knew that he resented any untruth amongst them as if it had been a personal insult. There was, indeed, no doubt that Michael was a son in whose proud looks a father might glory ; while with all his strength and power there were in him other and quieter charms, such as a mother might delight in. And Mrs. Langstroth did very greatly delight in what seemed to her her son's high and noble qualities, during the short time that she was allowed to do so.

“ I fear it will never last,” she would say to herself, watching him with prayer and trembling, as mothers do watch those sons

who have a way of turning into something so different from what the maternal yearnings would shape them into if, along with the yearnings, the power existed of fulfilling them. "I fear it will never last. Contact with the world will harden him. Flattery will make him vain. Universal homage will spoil him." Mrs. Langstroth was a sweet and saintly lady, and her son Michael a brave and noble boy; but what insignificant hen-mother exists who does not think that the attention to herself and her matchless offspring must of necessity be universal?

With pathetic, devoted blindness she would have prepared him to meet this irresistible tide of flattery and greatness by keeping him fast at her own side, and never loosing his leading strings. The mention of a public school drew tears from her eyes, and set her gentle heart beating wildly. It was written that her son Michael's education—every branch of it—

was to be taken out of her hands, and placed in others, firmer, harder, sterner, and to them who can survive their roughness, kinder hands than even those of a mother.

Gilbert, Michael's brother, was a well-grown boy, too, of ten, with a smaller, rounder head, a narrower forehead, and blue-gray eyes, which had a trick of languishing sometimes. He had an exquisitely soft and melancholy voice, was slow of speech, and possessed a graceful, though by no means effeminate figure. He was always, and apparently by nature, courteous and gentle in manner and speech, seldom indulging in the downright unflattering candour which Michael, for all he was so gentlemanly, frequently used towards his companions. Gilbert never said rude things to any one, but he was not so popular with his comrades as Michael.

The second boy, in order of years, was

swarthy Roger Camm, the son of the curate of Bradstane. Eleven were the years he counted in actual point of time—thirty, perhaps, and those rough ones, in his knowledge of care and trouble, in his painful, enforced acquaintance with grief, with contrivances and economies, and weary struggles to make both ends meet. For his father was not passing rich on forty pounds a year—he was more than passing poor on something less than a hundred, out of which he had dolefully to “keep up the appearance of a gentleman,” clothe and feed his son and himself, and educate the former. His wife, poor soul, exhausted with the endless and complicated calculations necessitated by this ever-present problem, had some years ago thankfully closed her eyes, and said good-bye to labour and grief. The curate and his lad struggled on without her as best they could. All that Roger learnt, whether of solid instruction or flimsy ac-

complishment—little enough was there of the latter to gloss his manners or appearance—he was taught by his father, and that with fasting and prayer. Along with his Latin and Greek declensions, he imbibed also the more bitter lesson of declining fortunes ; for his father had married late, and was not promoted as he grew older and more careworn. Side by side with the first problem of Euclid, as with the last, there was for ever present another, which it would have required more than a mere mathematical head to answer, and which yet imperiously demanded some sort of a solution ; it was the problem which Mrs. Camm had carried with her to her grave, and it ran : “Given, not sufficient income to buy a proper supply of butcher’s meat, cakes, and ale, how to make water-porridge twice a day, with skim-milk to wash it down, answer the same purpose as the more liberal diet, save on certain rare and solemn feast-days, not specified

in the calendar." And along with the invaluable rule, that prepositions govern the objective case (for the Rev. Silas Camm held fast by the Lindley Murray of his boyhood), Roger grasped and held fast the axiom, so that he could and did mould his conduct upon it, that to bear your hardships in silence is necessary—that to utter one word of complaint, to look greedily at occasional dainties, or to gorge in unseemly fashion on the abundance at other men's tables, no matter what the size of the internal void to be filled; to betray by word, look, or deed that you ever feel the pinch of hunger at home—to do this is disgrace of the deepest dye, second only to lying and stealing. By the time he was eleven years old, Roger had digested these lessons thoroughly, and had, as it were, assimilated them, so that they were in his system. Sometimes, at the abundant "spreads" on the Thorsgarth or Red Gables boards, his sallow young face would

take a faint glow, his deep-set black eyes would grow wistfully misty, but never a word betrayed the bareness of the board at home, nor the fact that his father might even then be asking a blessing upon a bowl of oatmeal-porridge, sole reward of a hard day's work. For the living of Bradstane, although ancient, was not rich, and the parish priest's own stipend was not a fat one. Judge, therefore, how exceeding short the curate must have come !

Roger was on good terms with all his companions, and if they sometimes wondered why he never used to ask them to go and play with him, or have tea with him, they were quite satisfied with his explanation, that there was no garden to his father's house, and they agreed with him, that without a garden to play in there could be no fun. He and Michael Langstroth, very dissimilar in almost everything, were fast friends, while Gilbert Langstroth and the fourth and last of this party of

boys hung together in a lukewarm manner, the older and calmer of them often quietly instigating the mischief that the younger one performed.

This fourth and youngest was Otho Askam, the only son of the master of Thorsgarth, and heir to the sombre-looking house, and the grand old garden in which they all disported themselves. Otho, like his friends, was tall for his age, and well set-up. One can but guess at the man to come, in the little father of eight years old. But Otho gave strong signs of individuality even at this early age. The other boys, if they had spoken their minds, would have said that he was fitful and moody in temper ; that no one could tell what would please, what offend him ; that, when he was pleased, it was in a saturnine, mirthless style, strange in so young a child ; that when offended, his wrath was more deep than loud, but that his brown eyes glowed, on such occasions, with a dull fire,

and his childish face in its anger took an expression of savage fierceness. They could also have related, these other boys, that when angry, Otho never rested till he had revenged himself, either by damaging or mutilating some of their cherished "things," or by doing them bodily harm, as grievous as his childish brain and small hands could devise and compass. By the end of the summer they had got used to it. They laughed at him, and talked about his "little rages." They were bigger and stronger than he was. The youngest of them was two years his senior. They used to tease him sometimes, on purpose to have the fun of seeing what shape his vengeance would take, and would shout with laughter at its feebleness when wreaked.

There was on record one great occasion on which Michael Langstroth had failed to see the amusing side of an escapade of Otho's, and had taken upon himself

to give him a sound hiding (with due regard, that is, to the difference in their ages and strengths). It was sound enough, however, for Master Otho to make the welkin ring again with his yells ; but the thrashing had been administered in payment, with interest, if possible, of Otho's wanton cruelty to a wretched, half-starved cat, which he had pursued with the vindictive determination not so much to compass its death, as to secure to it as long a term of torture as possible, before that death should take place.

"You cowardly little viper, you!" Michael had shouted, towering over him after the first half of the pummeling had been administered. "Don't you know that it's nothing but a coward, and a dirty one, that hurts things that can't fight back? You miserable little beggar, you!"

"Michael, I'll kill you, I'll kill you! I hate you! I wish the devil would get hold of you. I'll kill you some day for this.

What do you hit me for? I can't hit *you* back, you great coward!"

At which there was a great laugh from the other boys, none the less hilarious when the big lad, looking scornfully down upon the little one, said—

"I do it for your good, and you ought to be thankful for it."

Otho snuffled then, but took an early opportunity of laying a crooked root in an unexpected and obscure spot, over which Michael tripped ignominiously, and nearly barked his shins, when the snuffle became a joyful chuckle.

Later in the same afternoon, Michael Langstroth found himself apart from the other boys, in a lonely part of the garden, where a broad terrace ended, and rough, uncut grass, dotted with wild plants, began—the top of the river-bank, in fact. The lad seated himself on this bank, under a tree, just out of the broiling sun, and a silence and quietness fell upon him,

while he gazed before him into the gurgling, flowing river. It was a pastime he loved. Shadowy, half-formed thoughts passed through his brain at such times, thoughts as vague as the murmur of the river ; intuitions, impulses stirred him, whose nature he did not now understand, but which, for all that, might be not the less blessed and fruitful in years to come, when he should have forgotten these, their first upspringings ; for thus it is, as well as in other ways, that "the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

The river was the thing which Michael remembered longer than anything else. When a babe in his nurse's arms he had leaped at its sudden shimmer through the trees, and since then its presence had been ever with him, more or less. It had been his companion and confidant without his knowing it. He went unconsciously to its side to think out his young thoughts, and it carried all his vague meditations gliding

down its stream as it flowed between the two fair counties of York and Durham. Of course, he was not conscious how potent was its presence in his life; he would find that out only when he should come to move in other scenes—when he should get men for his companions instead of the stream.

Little more remains to be said of them at this time, save that the mothers of the Langstroths and of Otho Askam were both living then, young and beautiful women, one of them, at least, wrapped up in her husband and her children. Otho was the only one of the lads who had a sister, the little Eleanor, three years of age, and so much younger than they that she never shared their sports; and they knew nothing of her, save when they saw her sometimes walking on the upper terrace, led by her nurse or her mother, when she would sometimes stop and look at them with a pair of great candid eyes,

and burst into a laugh at some of their antics. A sturdy-looking, not very pretty child, with Otho's complexion, but little of his expression.

CHAPTER I.

OTHO'S RETURN.

IT was a dull morning in October, with a gray sky, low-hanging clouds, and muddy lanes. The Tees Valley Hunt breakfasted that morning at Sir Thomas Winthrop's, and the brothers, Michael and Gilbert Langstroth, rode slowly in company towards the house. Michael was now twenty-five, and Gilbert just turned twenty-three. They had ridden and hunted ever since they had been able to stick on the back of a pony, and, despite their changed fortunes—for the house of Langstroth was no more a flourishing house—they rode and hunted still. They felt a deeper degree of interest

than usual in this particular breakfast, for it was known to them, as to all the rest of the neighbourhood, that the long-closed doors of Thorsgarth had at last been thrown open; Otho Askam's minority was over, and he had come, or was on his way, to take possession of the house of his fathers, and the abundant revenues and possessions which had been accumulating for him. It was now several months since he had come of age, but he had not immediately repaired to his home. Now, Otho Askam, Michael and Gilbert Langstroth, and their friend, Roger Camm, had all played together as children in the Thorsgarth garden, had shouted through its avenues, chased each other amongst its discoloured marble fauns and nymphs, and almost succeeded, more than once, in drowning themselves in the waters of swiftly-rushing Tees, who flowed beneath the lowest terrace of the garden. That had been more than ten years ago, and many changes had taken

place since then. The Askam fortunes had accumulated; the deaths of both Mr. and Mrs. Askam had left their children—Otho, and a girl, Eleanor, several years younger than him—under the care of guardians, while their property increased. The Langstroths, on the contrary, had gone downhill to a certain extent. Poor then, they had become poorer since, till now, Mr. Langstroth, their father, was a hopeless, helpless invalid; Michael, the elder, was by way of earning his living as a country doctor, this chance having been given to him by the kindness of the old family friend and adviser, the little Quaker Doctor Rowntree, whose assistant Michael was supposed to be. Gilbert stayed at home, tended his father, and devoted his distinguished arithmetical powers to an endeavour to extricate the family fortunes in some degree from the confusion into which they had fallen. As for Roger Camm, whose father had been the curate

of Bradstane-on Tees, he had vanished for years past from the scenes of his childhood ; but he and Michael, who had been friends in those former days, were friends still, keeping up a close correspondence. And if Roger by any chance imagined that Gilbert had forgotten him, he was mistaken. Gilbert Langstroth had a long memory.

It was not only these brothers who looked forward with interest to the possibility of young Askam's presence at the meet that morning. All the country-side was more or less agog on the subject. Thorsgarth was a very considerable house ; the Askams were very considerable people in the neighbourhood. Every one was excited ; many fair creatures had gone so far as to say that they were "dying to see him," dying to know what he was like, and if he were going to be an acquisition, or not, to their society. People began to recall things, and to say to one another,

“ Ay, I remember how his mother used to ride to hounds ; what a woman she was ! How handsome, and what a temper ! ” And then the voices would sink a little, while for the benefit of some stranger it would be related how the late Mrs. Askam had come to her untimely end ; how she would go out one day, despite her husband’s expostulations ; how she put her horse at a certain fence, which he refused ; how she flogged him on till he unwillingly took the leap, and caught his legs in the top rail, pitching his rider head-foremost off him ; and how Mrs. Askam was carried home with a broken neck.

Half-forgotten things like these were talked about. Amongst all the wondering and speculation there was little kindness, little personal feeling. There was no matron who said, “ Ah, his mother and I used to be great friends ; I know I shall like him for her sake.” For, as a matter of fact, this reckless young woman, who

had so untimely died, had not made many friends during the years of her married life in Bradstane. Therefore, every one wondered ; no one really cared what sort of young man Otho Askam might be.

Michael and Gilbert rode slowly on through the deep lanes with their tangled hedges (for some of the folk thereabouts were not as particular about their clipping as they might have been) in the damp morning air, and, emerging from the lanes, struck the stony road, with its rough walls, over which they had to travel to arrive at Brigsdale Hall, Sir Thomas's place. They were to look at, as goodly a pair of brethren as any in whose company they were likely that day to find themselves.

"Is Magdalen coming to the meet?" asked Gilbert suddenly.

"Yes. She's driving Mrs. Stamer to it. She's staying with Miss Strangforth, and Magdalen doesn't know what on earth to do with her."

“Ah!” said Gilbert, with his slight, careless smile. “A meet must be a godsend under such circumstances.” And by-and-by he made some further observation, to the effect that it was a picture of a day, and that the scent would be grand, to which Michael assented cheerfully; and having got that question settled, they rode up to the hospitable door, delivered their horses over to a groom, and were shown into the dining-room.

Sir Thomas and his son Byrom were there, and the room was full of men, old, young, and middle-aged, standing about, waiting till their host should give the signal to be seated.

It was immediately on going into the room that they saw Otho Askam—for he it must be, and no one else—leaning his elbow on the shelf of an oak sideboard, and listening to some remarks of a neighbouring squire. He was at one end of the room as they entered, and they at the

other ; but it so happened that there was a little lane or vista from him to them, so that they saw him very plainly.

They looked upon a tall young man, as big, as strong, and as broad as themselves ; and there all resemblance ended. It would have been difficult to say whether that face were young or old for its years. Young Askam had a round, bullet-shaped head, a dark complexion, and one which was also red—a deep, but not yet a coarse red. His forehead, though narrow, was not devoid of power. His smooth dark hair was clipped close. He wore a slight moustache, a mere line on his upper lip, save for which his face was hairless, so that the full play of his lips was seen ; and there was something fierce in the expression of those lips ; indeed, the whole face was a strange and fierce one. The dark eyes were sullen ; the brows had a trick of drawing down and together, quickly and savagely, and then the whole

face flushed, and the mouth tightened, and the fingers closed with a suggestive grip upon whatever might happen to be in them at the moment. It was truly an angry-looking face, devoid of beauty ; and yet, if one came to analyze the features, it would be found impossible to pronounce it a plain face. The voice, the manners, were such as might be expected from the general outward appearance ; that is to say, the voice was abrupt, the sentences curt, and the words often chopped off short in utterance ; the manners were brusque, and had a touch of defiance in them.

At the moment when the Langstroths entered the room, Otho had his eyes fixed upon his whip, which he was drawing slowly through the fingers of his left hand. He smiled, and the smile showed a set of very white and very strong teeth ; it was not a gracious or a genial expression. Michael Langstroth, looking at him keenly and attentively, said to himself—

“Humph! he is a magnificent animal, at any rate. I wonder if he is anything else. I should not like to pronounce at a venture whether he were a gentleman or a blackguard; perhaps a bit of both.”

At this juncture, Askam, the curious, sinister smile still on his face, raised his eyes, and encountered those of Michael Langstroth fixed upon him. The smile vanished, the frown descended, above a defiant and inquiring stare. Evidently he said within himself, “Who is that man? I ought to know him.”

“Halloa, Michael,” cried the master of the house, at this point, “good morning to you. I’m glad to see you. How is your father to-day?”

As he listened to this, young Askam’s frown disappeared, and his look cleared, as if the thing that puzzled him had been made plain. By the time that Michael had done talking to Sir Thomas, Otho was at his side.

“I say—I ought to remember you. You are Michael Langstroth, aren't you?”

“Yes, I am. I was just coming to speak to you. This is my brother Gilbert; you ought to remember him, too, if you remember me.”

Otho shook hands with them. His countenance was not the best suited for expressing pleasure and geniality, but in a certain saturnine manner he seemed glad to see them both, though he did not say he was, but showed it by asking them many questions, with an air of interest—questions as to what they had been doing “all these years.” And he stood talking with them, and occasionally with Byrom Winthrop, who joined them, until the voice of Sir Thomas summoned them to the table, when, by some means, Otho and Gilbert found themselves seated side by side, and Michael was not very far away from them.

Otho Askam betrayed none of the

awkwardness which would have been natural to, and excusable in, a very young man, who suddenly finds himself a person of condition and importance amongst others, much older and much better known than himself. At the same time his manner was utterly destitute of anything like suavity or grace, or of aught that could give a clue as to his real habits or tastes in the matter of society ; none could discover from it whether he most haunted and best loved drawing-rooms, studies, clubs, or stables.

He appeared to be at his ease, and yet there was nothing easy about him. He did not laugh at all. Michael, who watched him attentively, could not detect anything more mirthful than that peculiar smile which had been on his face when he first saw him ; and it was a smile which might have been called sinister.

Gilbert and he seemed to keep up an animated conversation, but Michael,

though near, could not hear, for the hum of talk around him, what they said. He could only feel silently surprised that they had found any subject in common, for Gilbert, when not engaged in calculations, was something of a book-worm, and loved the flavour of a play or an essay, and was well-read in some of our older and less-known dramatists. Michael, though still uncertain whether Otho were most like a gentleman or a blackguard, had an inner conviction that he was neither literary in his tastes nor yet devoted to accounts.

Suddenly, in a momentary lull in the talk around him, he heard Otho say—

“But Dusky Beauty was bred in these parts. I’d take my oath of it.”

“Of course she was,” replied Gilbert, with animation. “She was bred in old Trueman’s stables, over in Friarsdale, out of Blue Blood, by——”

Here the words were lost in the hum of renewed talk, and Michael was no less

lost in astonishment. He felt quite feeble and bewildered with surprise. In all the years that he had known his brother, he had never heard him utter a word which could have led any one to suppose that racing or horses, beyond his own solitary hunter and riding-horse, had the faintest or most elementary interest for him. And yet, that was he giving information to Otho Askam (not receiving it from him, Michael reflected with astonishment) as to the immediate pedigree of the winner at one of the Spring meetings. More than once since he had finished his studies and been settled in Bradstane, it had been made manifest to him that Gilbert's character contained complexities which he had not fathomed, and here was another instance—to him the most remarkable of all. With a sense of bewilderment, he finished his breakfast, and when it was over rode forth with the others.

At the end of the day, towards five

in the afternoon, it came to pass that the three former playmates and new acquaintances rode through Bradstane town together.

"I say," said Otho—it seemed to be his favourite phrase for opening a sentence—"I wish you two fellows would look in upon me now and then. I dine at eight, and I am perfectly alone just now. It would be a charity if you would come. I can give you a glass of sherry that isn't so bad, and show you one or two trifles that might interest you, at any rate," and he turned pointedly to Gilbert.

They thanked him for the invitation. Gilbert promised, unconditionally, to go, and that soon. Michael said he would try; he would go as soon as he had time.

"You see," observed Gilbert, turning to Otho, with a worthy, benevolent air, "his time is not all his own. There's a lady in the case."

“Oh, indeed! You are engaged?” asked Otho.

“Yes,” said Michael.

“To some one here?”

“Yes. To Miss Wynter—Magdalen Wynter. She was at the meet this morning with an elderly lady. I was standing by their carriage for a good while.”

“That exceedingly handsome girl, who drove those white ponies so cleverly? She had black hair, and a very knowing sort of fur cap,” Otho said, looking at Michael with interest.

Michael smiled slightly. What a curious way in which to describe his beautiful and somewhat unapproachable Magdalen, was the thought in his mind.

“The same,” he answered, “though it would never have occurred to me to describe the cap as ‘knowing.’”

“Oh, wasn’t it, though!” said Otho, emphatically. “Well, I congratulate you. She is exceedingly handsome. There

wasn't another woman there who came anywhere near her. It won't do to be exacting in your case," he went on, with his dubious smile; "but, all the same, you will be very welcome if you come."

"Are you going to live alone?" Michael asked him. "Doesn't your sister stay with you?"

"My sister—Eleanor—she is at school. I see her sometimes," said Otho, carelessly. "She told me, the last time I called upon her, that she was going to college, and meant to carry off honours, if I didn't." He smiled again, and added, "We part here, I think. Good day. I am glad to have renewed our acquaintance."

They separated, going their several ways, and the Langstroths rode on in silence for a little time.

"Well," said Michael presently, "it cannot be said that he has turned out an interesting character."

"Opinions differ," was Gilbert's reply,

in a tone which, for him, might be called curt. "I think he is interesting."

"Do you? I should have said you were the last—— By the way, Gilbert, you might have knocked me over with your little finger at breakfast this morning when I heard you talking about Dusky Beauty and her pedigree. I didn't know you knew one race-horse from another."

"Well, I am quite certain you don't," said Gilbert, with less than his usual suavity; "and it is my principle not to try and entertain people by conversation about things in which they don't take the slightest interest. Otho Askam, there, does know one race-horse from another."

"What, is he horsey, then? Is that his little failing?"

"He is horsey—I don't know how much, yet," said Gilbert, with his gentle gravity. "That's what I have got to find out, and it is what I mean to find out. I shall give him the pleasure of my company on an

early day. You can please yourself when you go. Here we are."

After Otho Askam's arrival, which was, as it were, made public by this appearance amongst the gentlemen of his county, he and his sayings and doings furnished endless topics for the gossips of the neighbourhood. It was, of course, only by degrees that public opinion about him took a definite shape, but the process of collecting data on which to form one's opinion of a person's character is to many persons an even more delightful employment, and more enjoyable, than the frequent utterance of that opinion when found; though this, of course, must possess the higher quality of benefiting and instructing those who hear it.

The Bradstane neighbours—people in districts like that are neighbours if they do not live more than ten miles apart—abandoned themselves at first with joy and satisfaction, and a keenly pleasurable sense

of having found a new interest, to this first branch of the business—the collecting of data. Women asked their men—and declined to be put off with mere vague, general statements in reply—what they thought of Otho Askam; and men said things to each other about him, and laughed, or nodded, or shrugged, as the case might be.

The first interest gradually but surely turned into disappointment. People in general discovered, or felt that they had discovered, that Otho Askam was a decidedly horsey, slangy young fellow. It was soon made manifest that he had a powerful distaste for general society, as found in the country, with its dinners, dances, and lunches. Then again it was said—by whom no one could exactly tell—that he was full of whims and humours and oddities without end—not pleasant oddities; was very lavish of his money on one day, and very stingy with it on the

next; had a most moody and uncertain temper, which sometimes would run into fierce, white-hot passions, with little or no cause for them, or, again, into sullen silence, more difficult than the fury to understand or combat.

There was one group of facts eagerly seized upon by the scandalmongers, and even by those who were not scandalmongers, of the vicinity. The matrons and the maids around were alike grieved that a young man so richly endowed with every external advantage should prove so very ungentle, unpromising a character; that he should set at nought their customs, despise their burnt-offerings, and openly neglect their galas and festivities. That alone would have pained the matrons and the maids; but that was not all. There was a thorn more galling still, which he contrived to plant in their sides, so as to wound them shrewdly. After he had been at home a few months, it became universally

known that there was one house in the neighbourhood at which he visited often, indeed, constantly, and that one the last which would have been expected to attract him—at Balder Hall, namely, where old Miss Strangforth lived with her niece, who had for more than two years been engaged to Michael Langstroth. Magdalen Wynter had never been a favourite among the women of the country-side; she was exceedingly beautiful, and did nothing to conciliate them; she was penniless, and treated them as if they were beneath her. That winter she became less popular than ever, and the secret thought in many a virgin bosom was, “Greedy wretch! Could she not have been satisfied with one?”

This attachment to Balder Hall, and the innumerable times that his horse and he were reported to have been seen travelling over the road thither, was the canker which vexed the hearts of the

womankind. A good many of the young men began presently to say that Otho was so cross in his temper that the only way to get on with him was to let him alone as much as possible ; and, by-and-by, prudent fathers, however much they might have approved of him as a husband for one of their spotless daughters, began to think it was as well that their sons should not have too much to do with him. Nothing tangible had been alleged against him during those months ; nothing actively bad ; but, on the other hand, there was nothing good. In any of the staid pursuits of a country gentleman of his standing, politics, county business, public affairs of any kind, he took not the faintest or most elementary interest ; nay, he had been known, when occasion offered, to express a rough kind of contempt for them, and for those who troubled themselves with them. Altogether, Otho Askam, who had been a good deal looked forward

to as the coming man, created much disappointment now that he had come.

The last fact which formed food for gossip and wonderment was, that that gentlemanly, well-bred youth, Gilbert Langstroth, against whom scandal had never raised so much as a whisper, who was known to be good—look at the way in which he devoted himself to his failing father—and was said, by those who knew him, to be as clever as he was good—this paragon amongst sons and young men became the chosen friend and associate of Otho Askam, almost from the day of his arrival in Bradstane. Gossip exhausted itself in trying to find reasons for this alliance; in discovering points of resemblance between two such diverse characters, points which might account for the intimacy which had sprung up between them. Gossip spent her breath in vain. Undisturbed, and unheeding what was said about them, the young men remained

and continued to be friends, and friends who were almost inseparable. The neighbourhood presently discovered that to stand perpetually with a gape on one's mouth is undignified, so it presently ceased to gape, shrugged its shoulders, and said, "Well, if I were Mr. Langstroth, I should not like my son to form such an intimacy."

The neighbourhood could not possibly have been more surprised than was Gilbert's brother, Michael, though he kept his surprise to himself, and naturally did not hear very much of that felt by other persons. He had often chaffed Gilbert about his having no friends; acquaintances in plenty, but no chum, as the absent Roger Camm was Michael's own chum. Gilbert had always replied—

"Wait a bit. Every one does not suit me for a friend. When I do find one, I'll stick to him."

And then Otho Askam came. Gilbert appeared to have found the combination

of qualities he wished for in a friend, and his words were fulfilled. He "stuck to him."

The intimacy went on for more than a year, during which time the tranquil, gentle countenance of Gilbert Langstroth, with its slight, tolerant smile, was to be seen oftener than not side by side with the strange, fierce face of Otho Askam, with its breathless expression. "He looks," said a girl to Michael once, "as if he were always hunting something, and meant to kill it when he caught it."

It was undoubtedly a bizarre alliance, but at the end of a year people had, in a measure, got to accept it, and it was an understood thing that its effect upon Gilbert was one which he was quite able to sustain with impunity; in other words, that, whatever might be the case with Otho Askam, Gilbert Langstroth continued to be a respectable member of society, and was not even thinking of going to the bad.

CHAPTER II.

MAGDALEN—AND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.

OTHO'S arrival had been in the early part of October. The intimacy between him and Gilbert gradually increased, and the visits of the friends were not by any means confined to one party of the alliance. Otho was found as often seated in an old armchair in some one of the now faded and shabby rooms of the Red Gables, as Gilbert was in the statelier and better preserved apartments of Thorsgarth. Gilbert and his father lived alone together. They had so lived ever since Michael, having finished his medical studies, had come back and been made Doctor Rowntree's assistant. Mr. Langstroth was one of those

men who undoubtedly exist, who, by some means not to be accounted for by any personal charm or fascination, always have either a devoted wife or a friend who seems willing, nay, eager to give of his strength in order to make up for their weaknesses. So long as his wife had been living, Mr. Langstroth had had a prop. After her death, her place, as prop, had been taken by Dr. Rowntree, an old "friend of the family," whose yellow-washed house, with its green door and brass knocker, stood almost opposite the Red Gables, on the other side of the broad old square which formed the west end of Bradstane town. Doctor Rowntree had indeed been one of those friends who stick closer than a brother, who get little and give much, and who seem quite satisfied so long as they may go on giving, and get an occasional word significative of trust or appreciation. Sometimes it seems as if they could exist without even so much aliment for their

regard. It was at his instigation and by his advice that Michael had adopted the medical profession as his calling in life. Something had to be done ; their fortunes no longer permitted idleness on the part even of the eldest son of the house. Michael was utterly disinclined for the church, and his father for the expense of preparing him to enter it. For “doctoring,” as they roughly and ignorantly called the healing art, he had always shown a liking ; and, as most of his spare time had always been spent at the little Quaker doctor’s house, it was considered that he had had ample opportunities of judging whether this calling would suit him or not. He had elected to follow it, greatly to the jubilation of his old friend, and, having finished his student life, it had been decided that it would be to the comfort and vantage of all if he were to take up his quarters with Dr. Rowntree, instead of remaining at home.

“You won’t really be separated from them, you know,” said the doctor; “and, being on the premises, you’ll get so much better broken in to it.”

Mr. Langstroth agreed. In his heart he despised the doctor’s calling, and was angry and ashamed that a son of his should have to live by it; but, like many another before him, he took the benefits that he hated, and was satisfied so long as they were not put before him too prominently. He would have been best satisfied if Michael could have followed his “trade,” as the elder man contemptuously called it, away from Bradstane and his nobility; but the advantages of the present arrangement were too great and too obvious to be thrown away; there were no premiums to pay, no struggle to make. So Michael lived with Dr. Rowntree, and began to make himself acquainted with the far from easy life of a country doctor. His temper was sweet, and his spirit

beyond all idea of shame in his position, or complaint at having to work. He said little, but went to work with a will.

Gilbert had all along, and as it were by a sort of tacit consent of all parties, remained at home with his father, who was now a querulous invalid with a heart-complaint. Incidentally, too, as has been said, he devoted a good deal of his time and mind to the contemplation and manipulation of their affairs, family and financial. While Michael had been studying in London, letters had now and then come to him from Gilbert, suggesting that it was advisable to sell this or that farm, this or that lot of timber in the woods which still belonged to them. To do so would lessen their debts by so much, would ease their father's mind, and increase their income by diminishing the amount they annually had to pay away in interest. To all and each of which propositions, Michael had been in the habit of yielding unquali-

fied assent, saying that he thought it very good of Gilbert to sit boring his eyes out over accounts, in the days of his youth. He might as well have congratulated an old spider on weaving webs so skilfully, or complimented a shark on his kindness in following that which he best loved—prey, namely, or, in short, have thanked any person warmly for being so disinterested as to find pleasure in following his natural bent. Michael was very young, and hated all such tasks as those in which Gilbert passed his time. He might have had Gilbert's office, and Gilbert his, had he so chosen ; the option had been given him ; but he did not so chose, and it always seemed to him that his best thanks were due to his brother for industriously doing that which he would have so hated to do himself. Interested in his studies, and seeing a good deal of society, in which he was popular, by reason of his good looks, good birth, and entire absence of selfish-

ness or self-consciousness, Michael often thought what a good old man Gilbert was, and what thanks he, Michael, would owe him, for this sacrificing the days of his youth to an invalid father and a complicated account-book, in a quiet little country town at the world's end.

It certainly was a very quiet little town, as it is now, and probably always has been.

“Castle Bradstane,” says an old chronicler, “standeth stately upon Tese.” At the time of which he wrote, he probably literally meant the castle, the grim brown pile which stood on the Durham side of the stream, cunningly planted just at an outward sweep of one of its many curves. Gradually it had fallen into decay; other houses and a small town had gathered about its feet. Ivy and other creepers and climbers now clung about its fierce old towers. Wallflowers, ragwort, and the ivy-leaved snapdragon peeped and nodded in at the narrow little slits of

windows; kindly Nature did all in her power to beautify what had been so cruel and so hideous, till now the grim old fastness sat harmless aloft, and the river rushed and murmured far below, as of yore.

Any one who chuses, may learn how Walter Scott, with the seer's eye of genius, pictured Bradstane Castle, and the prospects which from its "watch-tower high gleamed gradual on the warder's eye;" and to this day, the prospect upon which it looks is little changed. Though the stream sweeps by beneath it, laden with the tale of several centuries more, their woe and bloodshed, grief and tragic story, yet the outlines of the land itself, the woods, the hills, must be similar to what they were when old Leland, looking upon it, recorded, "Castle Bradstane standeth stately upon Tese." The inhabitants, who gradually built houses, and clustered about the old pile and beyond it, to the east, had been, taken all in all,

a wild race of people, a border race. To this day they are bold, sturdy, and independent. Strange tales are sometimes told of the old families of the vicinity, gentle and simple—tales in which both gentleness and simplicity are conspicuous by their absence. Great cities have their great sins, their great faults, wrongs, and iniquities ; and we are very much in the habit of speaking in condemnatory terms of them, and of lauding the beauties of the country, and the simpleness and gentleness, and, above all, the naturalness and absence of pretension in the life there. And, certainly, city life, carried to excess, has in it a morbid feverishness and unrest which is no true life. But in country life, when it is lived in out-of-the-way spots—moorland farms, secluded dales, places far from railways and traffic — there is often a certain morbidness, as well as in the life of a town. The very solitude and loneliness tend to foster and bring out any peculiarities, any

morbid characteristics, and to confirm and strengthen eccentricities and idiosyncracies. One of the good things that much-abused progress will do in time, will be to sweep away some of these ugly old country habits of indolence and cloddishness, and selfish, soulless sensuality, which still exist, and that sometimes amidst the sweetest and most exquisite natural surroundings.

At this later time of which I write, Bradstane was more the abode of confirmed Philistinism than of anything else. There were a few wealthy and well-born families, who possessed seats in the neighbourhood—Halls, Parks, Courts, Houses—and who shut themselves up in them, and led their own lives, on no evil terms with the shopkeepers and dissenters of the village itself, but quite apart and distinct from them. The only one of these houses which stood within the precincts of the town was the Red Gables, Mr. Langstroth's dwelling-place. It was a large old

house, rising straight out of the street. The land that belonged to it consisted chiefly of farms in the vicinity, and some woods, more distant still.

Further out, at a fine old place higher up the river, situated like Thorsgarth, on one of its many "reaches," and called Balder Hall, lived an old maiden lady, Miss Martha Strangforth, at whose death, which, said wise report, could not be very far off, seeing that she was older than the century, and a martyr to rheumatic gout, her estate and fortune would pass to a nephew of the same name. Four years ago had come to live with her an orphan grand-niece, one Magdalen Wynter by name; a cold, handsome, self-contained girl of eighteen, who made no friends, and was seldom seen walking outside her aunt's grounds, but who sometimes passed through Bradstane town, driving in one of the Balder Hall carriages, dressed with a perfection of simple elegance which the

Philistine inhabitants called "plainness," and looking as if, for aught they could say to the contrary, all the world belonged to her. Sometimes she stopped at one of the shops, and then she was treated with respect, as the niece of rich old Miss Strangforth. On these occasions, she was wont to give very clear, concise orders, in a very clear, decided voice, low and gentle, but too monotonous to be called musical. Her beautiful young face was seldom, if ever, seen to smile; and yet, one could hardly have said that she looked unhappy, though she might have been accused of appearing indifferent.

Once, some few weeks after her arrival, stopping at the stationer's and bookseller's shop kept by Mr. Dixon, in the main street of the town, the footman opened the door, and she got out and went into the shop. Mrs. Dixon came forward to attend to her wants, and was followed by a pretty little girl of some ten years old,

a child with a delicate skin, small, oval face, straight little nose, brown hair and eyes—all very neat and clear, and clean and pretty. She hid rather shyly behind her mother.

“Is that your child?” asked Miss Wynter, pointing with her parasol at the girl.

“Yes, miss, this is Ada, our only one.”

“Oh, indeed! How old is she?”

“Ten, was a month last Sunday.”

“Ah, she is a pretty little creature. Does she go to school?”

“Yes, miss; but it’s her holiday-time now.”

“I wish you’d let her come home with me, and I’ll show her some pretty things. I am very lonely.”

The last words were spoken in the quiet, uninterested tone in which one says, “What a dull day it is!” as if they hardly referred to herself, but to something outside her.

“Oh yes, miss, she may go. I’m sure

it's very good of you. But I fear she'll be a trouble to you."

"Not at all, or I should not have asked her. Would you like to come with me, little Ada?" asked Miss Wynter, turning to the child neither coldly nor unkindly, but with no change of expression at all—no lighting up of her soft, dark, quiet eyes; not the ghost of a smile upon her tranquil sculptured lips.

At first, Ada hung back; and her mother began to expostulate with her, saying how good it was of the lady to invite her to go with her.

The lady, in the same soft and gentle tone, remarked presently—

"Oh, she won't understand that, of course. If you will come with me, Ada, I will give you a pretty necklace, and a ribbon."

At this prospect, all hesitation fled. Ada submitted at once to be made ready, Mrs. Dixon remarking admiringly—

“Eh, but you have found the right road to her heart, miss, and that cleverly.”

“I will sit here, and wait till she is ready. Don’t put on her best frock, or anything of that kind, you know. She will do just as she is.”

Miss Wynter furthermore promised to restore Ada to her home and friends later in the evening, but Mrs. Dixon said she had to send her servant to the Balder Hall farm for butter, and she should call for the little girl and bring her back. Ada was perched in the carriage beside Miss Wynter, in which position she was seen of sundry comrades as she drove away.

They called to her; asked her where she was going, and cried—

“Eh, but, Ada, what a grand lady you are, to be sure!”

Ada took no manner of notice of them, but looked straight before her.

“Why do you not kiss your hand to your friends, and say good-bye to them?”

asked Magdalen, turning indifferently, as she lay back, also indifferently, and looked with languid curiosity at the little flushed face and small figure, bristling with importance, beside her.

“’Cause I’m a young lady, and they are little common village girls,” was the reply, so unexpected, that even Miss Wynter’s eyes were opened wide, and her eyebrows were raised, as she heard it.

“Indeed?” she said. “And do you think you are really a young lady?”

“Not like you, yet,” was the reply, “because I’m not old enough; but I shall be sometime. Mamma says I’m so pretty I shall be sure to marry a gentleman; and I’m going to learn French and music.”

“Oh, indeed!” drawled Magdalen. “You are going to marry a gentleman. What is a gentleman? Did your mother tell you that, too?”

“She didn’t tell me, but I know,” replied Ada.

“Well, suppose you tell me. Then I shall know, too.”

“A gentleman is rich, and has a large house, and——”

“Does a gentleman keep a shop?”

“No.”

“Then what is your father?”

“Oh, I don’t know.”

Magdalen proceeded, in a languid, indifferent way, to draw her out. In a very short time she had gauged the depths, or rather the shallows, of Ada Dixon’s mind. It contained nothing but shallows then; it was destined never to contain anything else, henceforth and for evermore.

From that day she was more or less Miss Wynter’s *protégée* and plaything. Sometimes the connection flagged; sometimes when the winter weather was bitter, or the summer heats overpowering, when Miss Wynter was indolent, and when Ada was promoted to a boarding-school, there were gaps in the intercourse; but the

acquaintance was never broken off, and it was not without its influence in both lives, and on more destinies than theirs alone.

The Dixons were well-to-do, prosperous, conventional tradespeople, more retail than wholesale in every sense of the words. He had grown fat by charging sixpence where other people charged fivepence, by a consistent practice of telling many lies during the week, and diligently repenting him of his transgressions and bewailing his sins twice every Sunday in the parish church. That is, he bewailed his sins with his mouth, and whenever bewailing happened to be printed in the Prayer-book; but he knew much better than the Prayer-book what was the way in which to get on in the world, and perhaps, if he had spoken out his whole mind, cleanly and honestly, would have said that since the Lord, by putting so much competition into the world, had made it such a hard business for folk to hold their heads above

water, He must even excuse them from doing it in the best way they could.

Mrs. Dixon, like a faithful and loyal wife, had aided and abetted him in his praiseworthy efforts to get on in the world. They had succeeded in their aim, and were respected and looked up to by all who knew them. He was vicar's warden, an overseer of the poor, one of the best-known men in public and parochial affairs in all the district. He could afford to send his daughter to school ; to keep her out of the shop ; to dress her "stylishly," as they called it ; to give her a piano, and buy pieces of music for her to play upon it ; and all these things he did with a good grace, and looked to Ada to form an alliance which should be to the credit of the family and her own glory.

There were other well-to-do tradesmen in Bradstane, and many who were but ill-to-do. There was the lawyer, Mr. Coningsby, who lived not far away from

the Langstroths ; there was Doctor Rowntree ; there was the vicar, Mr. Johnson, with Mrs. Johnson, his wife, and their numerous progeny. They lived in an old brown house, in a kind of close, near the church, with a walled garden containing apricot and plum trees. Other religious bodies were represented by two dissenting ministers and their flocks, and by a Friends' Meeting, the head and front of which was Doctor Rowntree.

These denominations, of course, had churches and chapels in which they worshipped. There were some curious old houses in the main street, and there was a long and unlovely thoroughfare called Bridge Street, more like a slum than anything else, where the women were pale, and the children stunted, and the inhabitants of which, taken all in all, did not enjoy the best of reputations. One side of this street was built to the river-bank overhanging the stream ; and in the spring and

autumn, or when thunderstorms prevailed, the lower rooms of those houses would be flooded. Going along Bridge Street, one did not guess how near the river one was, till one came upon an opening here and there—a gully, or a tunnel, or a narrow, dark passage—and looking down it, one could see the rushing brown waters flowing ceaselessly on, without haste and without rest, from the fastnesses whence they had sprung—

“Where Tees in tumult leaves his source,
Thundering o’er Cauldron and High Force.”

Such was, superficially, the outward aspect of Bradstane town, when Otho Askam and the two Langstroths met after their many years’ separation; such it had been for years back. It was not what is called “a growing town,” and whatever drama might be played within its precincts, its exterior, objective side, was not likely to change very much.

CHAPTER III.

LANGSTROTH'S FOLLY.

ONE November evening, or rather, late in the afternoon, Otho had dropped in at the Red Gables, where he had found Gilbert and his father. Mr. Langstroth received the young man with urbanity ; he had all along seemed satisfied with Gilbert's new friend. Gilbert himself looked up from his desk, and greeted the visitor tranquilly.

"Sit down, and make yourself at home," said he, pushing a tobacco-jar towards Askam.

But Otho did not at once sit down. "Will you come home and dine with me ?" he asked, in his curt way.

"I'm sorry I can't," Gilbert said, polite as usual. "You see these papers? I have more than an hour's work upon them yet."

Otho never scoffed at Gilbert's "business," though he was ready to sneer at that of any one else. All he uttered now was a disappointed "Humph!"

"Stay and have dinner with us," said Gilbert. "How did you come?"

"I rode."

"From home? On your way anywhere?"

"No. I'm on my way from Balder Hall," replied Otho, with something like a scowl.

Gilbert looked at him, carelessly, it seemed. Then he said—

"Well, send your horse round, and stay, as I said—I want Askam to have dinner with us," he added, turning to his father.

"I wish he would. We shall be de-

lighted, if he will take us as we are," responded Mr. Langstroth.

Otho still seemed to hesitate a little, till Gilbert, with a rather steady look at him, which was not seen by his father, continued—

"Look here. I'll propose something else. I've been tied down to this work all day, and I haven't had a turn out of doors. Dine with us, as I said, and afterwards I'll walk back with you to your house. I have an errand in the town. It'll do you no harm to travel on your own legs for once in a way, and you can send one of your fellows for your horse. How will that do?"

Otho's brow cleared. "That will do very well," said he, taking a chair. "It suits me down to the ground. Get on with that work, and I'll talk to your father."

Gilbert, having rung and given his orders as to the accommodation of Otho's

horse, turned his back upon them, and did not address another word to them until the man announced dinner, when he put his papers in a drawer which he locked, and gave his arm to his father to support him to the dining-room. Otho followed them. Despite the poverty of the house of Langstroth, the meals there were always rather choice, well-cooked, and well-served. Mr. Langstroth, it was understood, depended a good deal for his health of mind as well as of body upon the due observance of such things. Soon after they had begun, Gilbert observed carelessly that they hadn't seen Michael all day ; he had expected him to dinner.

"He's dining at Balder Hall," said Otho, even more curtly than usual.

"Ah ! Had he arrived when you left ?"

"No."

"And how was my future sister-in-law ?"

"She said she was all right," was the gruff reply, as Otho fixed his eyes for a

moment upon Gilbert, a little defiantly, one might almost have said. Nothing more was said about any of these topics—Balder Hall, or Michael, or Magdalen. When dinner was over, and they had gone back to the library, Gilbert settled his father with the greatest care, arranging with his own hands his easy-chair, small table, reading-lamp, and all his other requisites.

“You won’t mind my leaving you for an hour or two?” he asked.

“Not at all, Gilbert. You want some air and exercise. Go and get it.”

“Would you like me to ask the doctor to call in?”

“No, no,” was the somewhat testy reply. “I see him often enough, without you asking him to come.”

“Michael is sure to look in on his way home, but I shall most likely be back by then.—Now, Otho, if you’re ready.”

As they stepped out of the house, they became aware that a change had fallen

over the weather, which had been cold. The sky was full of rack, driven rapidly across it by a strong yet soft south-west wind. The moon gleamed fitfully through the clouds, and a gush of rain was blown against their faces.

“Halloa! Raining!” exclaimed Gilbert. “Do you mind a drop of rain?” he added, “or will you ride home?”

“Oh, I’m not afraid of a little weather,” replied Otho. “Where do you want to go?”

“Where you have never been yet,” said his companion. “Down to the Townend, as they call it. Come along. It isn’t much out of our way to Thorsgarth.”

Otho followed in a docile manner. Now that he had got what he seemed to have been aiming at, his *tête-à-tête* with Gilbert, all traces of sullenness and impatience had vanished. Bulldogs, surly to all the world beside, are tame and obedient to their masters; and there was a good deal

of the bulldog in the way in which Otho followed Gilbert about.

When they had got through the busiest and most inhabited part of the town, they found themselves almost alone in a steep street, descending rapidly towards the river. As they got further down it, the houses gradually became more bare and rough-looking ; and, some of them, more and more ancient in appearance. Looking down the hill, it appeared as if the street ended in a *cul de sac*, as if there were no egress that way from Bradstane town. And the wall which appeared to shut the place in, and block up the road at that side, consisted of the frontage of two high factories. There was in reality a narrow passage between them, through which access was obtained to the river, and by means of which one arrived at an iron footbridge, ugly, but useful. This could not be perceived at the distance they now were from the mills.

"What on earth do you want down here?" growled Otho, between two puffs at his pipe.

"We possess a bit of property down there," Gilbert answered him. "It is perfectly meaningless and perfectly useless to us. It cumpers the ground, and has swallowed up a pot of money which we ought to be enjoying the benefit of now. I sometimes walk down to it, to look at it, and think what a folly it was. 'Langstroth's Folly,' it ought to be called. Townend Mills is the name it actually bears. There it is!" as the moon shone out brightly for a few minutes, and showed the dark mass of the factories rising almost directly in front of them.

"You're a queer one!" said Otho, not without a kind of admiration in his tones. "Where's the sense of fretting yourself by coming and looking at it? It's like trying to heal a raw by scraping."

"Your simile would be just, if I did

irritate myself," replied Gilbert gently. "My dear Otho"—he spoke impressively, and laid his hand for a moment on the other's arm—"I never let anything irritate me. I make it a rule——"

"Never—I never say never," said Otho. "No saying what will turn up. Leave it to chance. That's the best way. Besides, Mag—some one was saying to me, only the other day, that it's only very young people who *never* do what they oughtn't."

It was on the tip of Gilbert's tongue to say, "I know I am young, but, then, I have taken care to be very wise, too," because we are apt to blurt out the thoughts nearest our hearts. But he said quietly—

"Yes, I know I am young, but I have had a good deal to do that generally falls to older people. With Michael choosing to leave us and take his own way, I have had a good deal to think about, and a good deal of help to give to my poor

governor in his business affairs ; and I soon found that, if you want to get on at all in business, you *must* keep your temper, especially when you are a poor man, with fallen fortunes, against the world——”

“ Be hanged if I could ever keep my temper about business, or anything else that went wrong with me ! ”

“ Ah, you can afford to lose your temper,” said Gilbert, in a cold voice, which caused Otho hastily to say that he had meant no offence ; and Gilbert proceeded—

“ So, as I say, I don't let the Townend Mills irritate me, though one might get irritated enough about them if one would ; but I come and smoke my pipe, and walk round them now and again, and think quietly. I feel as if I might, some time or other, have a good idea on the subject, you know—an idea that might be worked into something. Don't you trouble yourself about them. I won't detain you long. Here we are ! ”

They had entered the long, narrow passage between the mills. It was now late, getting near ten o'clock, for they had not left the Red Gables till after nine. The clouded sky made the night darker—a darkness which was deepened, if anything, by the occasional gleams of moonlight when the rack parted. At the end of the passage there was visible a kind of gray shimmer, and in the intervals between the gusts of wind they could hear the rush of the river.

“Wherever one goes, one comes upon that river,” exclaimed Otho, not as if he were much delighted with the fact.

“Yes. Tees keeps us pretty well aware of his presence. It's as twisted and crooked a stream as any in England, I should imagine. There are the mills, Askam. Now, I'll tell you my object in life, if you like.”

“What is it?” asked Otho, with deep and unfeigned interest.

“ I wish—at least, I intend to overcome the obstacle raised in my way by the idiot who built these mills. I like overcoming obstacles. I intend, some day, either to have them sold, and the price of them in my pocket, or else to see them filled with machinery, and working again at a profit.”

“ But you don't understand how to manage mills,” said Otho diffidently.

“ No, but I understand how to manage men. And I know a fellow who understands how to manage mills—Roger Camm. Do you remember Roger Camm ? He used to be a playfellow of ours—the curate's son.”

“ A swarthy fellow, very big and strong, who always looked rather hungry, and yet always said he wasn't when we used to go in to tea ? ”

“ The same. I see you have an accurate memory. I guess he was hungry too, poor beggar. He was over here, a year or two ago, stopping with

Michael ; they are great chums. And he told me all about himself. He cut the Church. He said his governor never got anything out of it but water-porridge and civil contempt from people who weren't as good as himself. He was rather bitter about it. Anyhow, he cut it, as I say, and took to the intelligent working-man line. He is foreman in a Manchester factory now, and he knows something about it all, I can tell you. I made him promise that when I sent for him he'd come and take the management of this concern—'run it' for me, as they say in America."

"Ah, and when will that be?"

"When I find my purchaser or tenant," said Gilbert, as suavely as ever. "He told me all the reasons why these would never succeed as cotton factories—they are the only mills in the place ; the station is a mile and a half away, and there is a steep hill, nearly half a mile long, from here to the top of the town. Oh, I've mastered the

subject. Jute—that is what I shall do with them—spin jute, and get women and girls out of Bridge Street for hands.”

“Yes?” said Otho tentatively, really interested, and ardently wishing that he understood a little more about it. “And your father and—brother?” Michael’s name seemed rather to stick in his throat.

“My father says he only wishes I could. Michael is dead against it. Michael would like to pull the whole place down.”

“What for?” asked Otho sharply.

“Because he’s a fool,” was Gilbert’s reply. The intimacy between him and Otho had, it would seem, progressed quickly.

“Because he’s a fool,” repeated young Askam, leaning his elbows on the balustrade of the bridge, to which they had now advanced, and staring down into the rushing brown river. The expression on the face, which the darkness concealed, was not a pleasant one. “Curse him!”

he muttered to himself, so low that even Gilbert did not hear him ; but the river carried the sound, along with all the other messages with which it was laden, towards the sea.

“Come along !” said Gilbert, after a brief, silent pause. “There’s no use staying here any longer.”

Otho raised himself from the bridge, and they retraced their way through the silent passage, up the steep street, and to where a road to the right led in the direction of Thorsgarth. They had not spoken a word since leaving the mills.

“I think it’s rather late for me to be going with you,” said Gilbert, hesitating at the corner.

“Not a bit ! What’s ten o’clock ? You’ve got a key, I suppose ? You said you would come,” said Otho rapidly, and almost savagely. “And I want to speak to you.”

“Oh, I am willing, and—well, Michael

will see my father again before he goes to bed—sure to. He will be leaving Balder Hall by now, I dare say. They keep early hours there.”

“Where there’s an old woman like that precious Aunt Martha, they must,” said Otho. “Look here, Gilbert, how did your brother Michael get Magdalen Wynter to accept him?”

“By being the only man in the world who proposed to her, or was likely to do so,” said Gilbert cynically.

“I don’t see that. She is the handsomest woman I ever saw.”

“She hasn’t a penny, and won’t have. She isn’t popular—but the reverse, and no man, except Michael, ever penetrates within those walls—oh, and you,” he added, with a laugh, as he turned to Otho.

“You haven’t accounted for it yet,” said the latter sullenly.

“Well, say she was in love with him.”

“In love with my eye!”

Gilbert laughed again. "I give it up," said he. "It's a conundrum I have often set myself, to no purpose. Michael is ten thousand times too good for her; but that's nothing to the point. I don't know why she took him."

"She ordered me off this afternoon, because he was coming to dinner," Otho said, in a voice of choking anger. "She told me my whole body wasn't worth his little finger. She——"

"You might be in love with her yourself," suggested Gilbert; and, indeed, a less astute observer might have been struck with the same idea.

"I'll be hanged if I am—insolent minx!" retorted Otho savagely. "No girl shall behave to me as she has done, with impunity. She shall pay for it. But, tell me, how long were they in making it up?"

"Oh, not long; about six weeks. He was home for his holidays one summer, and we were talking together in front of

the house. Miss Strangforth's carriage, with her and Magdalen in it, drove by. The old lady saw us bowing, and stopped. I introduced Michael; he fell in love on the spot, then and there, over head and ears. Martha asked him to drive with them, and he drove. Drove deeper and deeper into love, I suppose; and—yes, it was just six weeks later, they were together at a picnic to Cauldron, and they returned engaged. My father has never got over it."

"How?" asked Otho, in the same strangled voice.

"He thought it so idiotic and imprudent. And so it was, and is. But Michael had become a man over the doing of it. They stuck to it, and they have stuck to it ever since. Some day, I suppose they will be married; but I don't know when."

Otho made absolutely no reply to this prophecy. They turned in at the Thors-

garth gates, and the subject was dropped. But Gilbert knew now why Otho had given them his company at dinner, and why he himself had been so earnestly pressed to go back to Thorsgarth after their walk.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FACULTY OF CLOSE OBSERVATION.

ONE night, during the winter which followed the conversation between Otho and Gilbert, a large ball was given at a well-known house in the neighbourhood of Bradstane, and present at it were both the Langstroth brothers, Magdalen Wynter, and even Otho Askam, little as he loved such entertainments. Perhaps Gilbert had persuaded him to go.

Magdalen was chaperoned by a good-natured matron, who had married off all her own girls with credit and renown, and could therefore afford to witness with complacent amusement the gaspings and

strugglings of those who were still, as Otho might elegantly have put it, "in the running." She had not that dislike to Magdalen which animated more interested persons ; she admired her beauty, and considered her "good form." Magdalen herself had never looked better than she did that night, or more haughtily and superbly independent of all outside support. She was richly attired, for Miss Strangforth liked her niece to dress splendidly. She danced very seldom ; it had never been her habit to do so often ; and as not even her rivals, while in possession of their senses, would have dreamed of saying that this was because she could not get partners, and as her sitting out usually involved also the sitting out of some man who would otherwise have been free to dance with another girl, and as the said men always looked perfectly happy and satisfied in their inactivity at such times,—her habit did not in any way make her more popular.

To-night it was observed that she danced twice with her betrothed, twice with Otho Askam, and once with Gilbert. Perhaps that might have been endured without much adverse criticism, but it was noticed also, and bitterly noticed, that Otho danced with no one else, though both Michael and Gilbert did.

On the following afternoon, Gilbert, returning from a solitary, meditative ride, far into the country—such a ride as he loved to take, and did take, almost every day—found himself outside the palings at one side of the Balder Hall Park. Looking over them, he saw within the figure of Magdalen Wynter. She was pacing quickly up and down a sort of woodland path, which in summer must have been almost concealed, but which was now plainly visible between the trunks of the naked trees—visible, at any rate, to Gilbert as he sat on horseback. There was a broad belt of rough grass, in which grew ferns, and

from which also rose the leafless trees just spoken of. Then came the path on which Miss Wynter was walking, and beyond that a glade, sloping steeply down to where Tees flowed by in one of his many curves.

Gilbert saw a dark, close cap of velvet, and a pale face which drooped somewhat beneath it, a long, fur-bordered mantle tightly clipped around the wearer's form, the bottom of a crimson kilting peeped beneath it, and a pair of small, well-shod feet. Her back was turned to him, and he stopped and looked over the palings till she turned, lifted her head, and saw him. She gave a little start.

"Oh, Gilbert, how quietly you must have come!"

"Not so very. The ground is hard and frosty, and my horse's hoofs rang. It is your deep thoughts, Magdalen, which render you deaf to outside things."

She had walked across the grass, which

was dry and hard, and crunched frostily under her feet, up to the paling, and held up her hand to him. Gilbert rarely met his future sister-in-law, and it has been seen that in speaking of her to his friend, Otho Askam, he did not employ terms exactly of enthusiasm ; but if ever they did encounter each other, whether by chance or design, he was always scrupulously amiable and polite to her. Whether this meeting had come about by chance—whether he had intended that it should come about—this is a thing known only to himself. As he looked down now, into the marble paleness and wonderful beauty of the girl's face, he gave no sign, and she said to him—

“Are you riding alone?”

“Yes, just as you see me. I have been a long way—nearly to Middleton-in-Teesdale.”

“I have been walking for an hour, up and down this path. I am beginning to

find it rather monotonous, and am going in for some tea. Will you come and have some, too?"

"With pleasure, if you can put up with such a feeble substitute for my brother. I think the North Lodge is just round here, isn't it?"

"Yes. I will meet you there. Then we can walk to the house together."

They did so, Gilbert dismounting at the lodge, and leading his horse. The short winter day was closing in, gray and cold, as they went up the avenue.

"How did you enjoy the dance?" he asked.

"Not much. I never do. Did you?"

"I always enjoy watching other people's little games."

She gave a short laugh. "Do you mean mine?"

"Yours—nay. How can you have any?"

"Just what I was going to say. I mean,

if you were looking for what you call 'games' with me, your trouble must have been wasted, that's all."

"Of course. No ; I meant all the other girls, and their mothers, and the men, too, for that matter."

She laughed again, shortly and contemptuously.

"And Otho Askam," he pursued tranquilly.

Magdalen looked up. "What ? Has he got plans, or 'games,' as you call them ?"

"I was amused to see his devotion to you last night, and what a rage those women were in about it. His game is to avoid all the girls whom he might possibly be supposed to be desirous of marrying. He told me so. He is mortally afraid of being trapped. And of course, he is even more afraid of the mothers than of the girls. You are quite harmless, you see. You are promised to Michael. He feels so safe and happy with you."

“Poor, innocent lamb!”

“Isn’t he? It shows how blindly he trusts in your probity, and in your devotion to Michael. He comes to Balder Hall sometimes, doesn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“He never asks me to go with him.”

“No?”

“It is so amusing, I think. What does Michael say to it?”

“Michael—oh, he laughs, and says it is very good of me to let him come, and that it is a good sign for Mr. Askam’s future career that he frequents any decent society at all,” she said, with a short, dry laugh, of which Gilbert’s answering one seemed an echo, so much were they alike in tone.

“How beautiful of him! When you are married to him, Magdalen,” he added, speaking very slowly, and openly watching her face—“when you are married to Michael, and fairly established as Mrs. Langstroth, for which consummation you

have waited so faithfully and so patiently,"—he dwelt upon all his words—"I should say that then Michael would find it rather a bore to have Otho Askam coming in, and you would, too. Don't you think so?"

"How can I tell? I should say that Otho Askam would find it a bore himself, when I am married to Michael, if ever I should be. As you say, I have waited a long time, and I may have a longer one yet to wait, before I am Michael's wife."

She spoke with a dead monotony of tone, and a no less monotonous expression in her face. They stood now in front of the house. Magdalen beckoned to a gardener's boy, and told him to send a groom for Gilbert's horse, after which they went into the house, into Magdalen's sitting-room, and she cast off her fur cloak, and began to make tea, with the firelight shining on her crimson gown. Gilbert sat in a low chair and watched her, but said

nothing. Only when she handed him his cup of tea, he said softly—

“Magdalen, I do wish you and Michael could be married to-morrow.”

“Thank you.”

“Then your life would be brighter.”

“Who told you it was dull?”

“All your actions and words tell me so.”

“You and I are what they call quiet people,” she remarked. “Not impressionable, and all that kind of thing.”

“I believe that is the general opinion of our characters.”

“Well, and people also seem to think that such creatures—pachydermatous, don’t they call animals with thick skins——”

“Has Michael been lending you some science primers to while away the time in the winter evenings? What a happy thought of his!”

“You haven’t answered my question.”

“They do—pachydermatous is the word.”

“They seem to think that, because we are not all on fire, and jerking about, for nothing, we can do without any excitement at all.”

“I have observed the existence of the delusion you speak of. Yes, thank you, I will have some more cake.”

“I don’t know what you think, but I feel to want more excitement than most people, and I get less. Last night, if I could have been sure that Michael would not have misunderstood me, I would have danced every dance with Otho Askam, if the result had been that not a woman would have spoken to me at the end of the evening. That’s the kind of feeling I have.”

“I can quite understand it. I wish you would have tried the experiment—say with me.”

“That would not have been at all the same thing. You are a very good young man, and Otho Askam is considered rather a bad one.”

“ Michael is the best of us all.”

“ It is not that I like bad people, but I like to sing in a different key from that used by all the rest. I should like to see them all looking as if the world were coming to an end. . . . By the way, Gilbert, are you such a very good young man? They say you are too great a friend of that timid creature we have been talking about, who only dances with engaged girls, to be very good.”

Gilbert started—within himself, not outwardly, stirred his tea, and said carelessly—

“ Perhaps I cultivate him for reasons like your own—because I am dull, and it makes people vexed.”

“ Perhaps. He is very rich, of course. Gilbert, you have wished me such good wishes about Michael, it is only fair that I should wish you well in return. I wish Otho Askam would relieve you of those factories that I have heard you speak of. Then there would be more money in your

coffers, and perhaps more chance of that marriage coming off, of which you have been speaking so kindly."

"You are very good," said Gilbert, laying down his empty cup; "but gentlemen are not in the habit of twisting their friends' pockets inside out, for their own advantage."

"Oh no! But if the friend had a leaning towards commercial enterprise—a speculative spirit. It would be an amusement for him."

"*If* he had. But you know as well as I do that his tastes are not of that kind, but of the turf, turf."

Magdalen smiled, and said, "I know that his tastes are for anything exciting, anything highly flavoured. What will you wager that he is tired of the turf in a year from now?"

"Nothing at all. If I did wager on that subject, I would wager to the contrary."

"Well, I think his superfluous cash would be more respectably employed in setting your factories going."

Here a loud ring sounded through the house.

"I should not wonder if that were Michael calling," said Magdalen, and she spoke in hurried tones. "Remember, Gilbert, not a word of this. I feel better for speaking to you ; and Michael is good, oh, so much better than any of us ! And he has cares of his own. And you will be my brother, some day. Do you understand ?"

"My dear Magdalen, of course ! Do not distress yourself, pray. There is no need," he assured her, as Michael entered.

"Why, Gilbert, that is well," said he, with a look of great pleasure. "I have often wished that you could spare time to ride out and have a chat with Magdalen now and then. Where did you meet ?"

Michael sat half an hour, and then the

brothers rode home in company. Magdalen, when the two young men had left her, sat for a long time over the fire, gazing into its glow, her elbows propped on her knees.

“Gilbert is very observant—remarkably observant,” she thought to herself. “Who would have thought that he would see so quickly, and Michael be so blind? And yet again, Gilbert sees, but sees only to dissect—without any feeling, unless it be a feeling of pleasure in showing one his power. Michael does not see, but if he did he would sympathize. He is grand—at least, he would be if he were awake. With all his love for me, I have not been able to awaken him. His time is yet to come. Sympathize—yes; but what is sympathy? He can’t give me what I want. Here am I, beautiful, yes, very beautiful, and very strong, and with some brains in my head, though they all think I have none. And I have to live, to

vegetate, that is, as if I were some worn-out old woman, as if I were my own great-aunt. It is horrible, horrible, and I do not know how long I shall be able to bear it."

A dreary blank seemed to open before her mind's eye, and still she sat motionless, staring into the fire.

"Michael is my lover—he does love me, too. He is the only friend I have, for no one is fond of me. If they were kind to me, and really cared for me, I would not take their Otho Askam away from them. I wonder if they know what he is, this creature that they make such a fuss about! Perhaps there would be no fuss if he were dancing attendance on any one but me—fuss, of course, there would be no fuss. Gilbert and I know what he is. He has not been able to conceal his miserableness from us. And we know that he himself—the man—is not worth fighting for. But I do not mean to let

them have him, all the same. It amuses me to keep him, and to enrage them. And I shall go on amusing myself in that way. Michael is very good, but he is not—amusing. If I were married to him, I wonder if I should find it as dull as I do being engaged to him. Surely not. But——”

Here Miss Strangforth's maid came in, and said her mistress was awake, and was going to have a cup of tea, and would be glad if Miss Wynter would go to her. Magdalen went instantly, and whatever the state of her own heart, she did not let her great-aunt feel dull while she sat with her.

CHAPTER V.

GILBERT'S CAUTIOUSNESS.

As the young men rode homewards, Michael again expressed his pleasure at Gilbert's visit to Balder Hall. Gilbert, for his part, was meditative and rather silent during the first part of their ride, but was presently roused into animation by a remark of Michael's. Some days before, Gilbert had been expounding to Michael, as he was now and then in the habit of doing, just so much as he thought fit for him to know of his financial arrangements and schemes for the future. He had informed his brother that the estate was being very gradually retrieved, that he, Gilbert, began to see daylight—a first

glimmer, through the obscurity. All his plans, he said, were working well, except one, which, if he could only accomplish it, would give an impetus to everything else, and shorten his work by years ; and that one was, of course, the sale or letting of the Townend factories. He could not sell them : he could not find any capitalist to work them.

Gilbert had been very much in earnest when he spoke—in his way of being in earnest, that is, not vehemently, but gently. He spoke of the mills, even of the trouble they gave him, with respect—a respect which he would have accorded to no other topic or kind of topic under the sun. Consequently, it had jarred on his mood when Michael, lightly flicking his boot with his riding-whip (for he had looked in at the Red Gables on his way from his daily round), and glancing round the room as he spoke with an absent look, asked—

“ Then, have we no capital now ? ”

Gilbert looked at him, almost sharply at first, and then with a patient expression, like that of a conscientious teacher trying to instil some branch of knowledge into a peculiarly dense pupil.

“ Not a quarter enough to set the mills agoing,” he said. “ And if we had, it is too risky a venture for capital like ours, that has been snatched, as it were, out of the gulf it had been flung into.”

“ But if it is too risky for our capital, surely it is too risky for that of a stranger.”

“ That does not follow at all, as any business man could tell you. It does not follow that because it would be risky for our capital, it would also be the same for that of a stranger ; it would entirely depend upon who the stranger might be, and what the extent of his possessions.”

To this Michael had made very little reply. Gilbert imagined that he had forgotten it, but was undeceived as they now

rode together in the winter moonlight. It was yet early, but dark, save for the clear, frosty-looking crescent in the sky.

"I met Sir Thomas Winthrop this afternoon," observed Michael. "We rode together for a little while, and we were talking about those factories. Sir Thomas says he wonders my father does not pull them both down. The land would sell fast enough, without them, for building, and they are in want of cottages down there."

There was a slight pause. Then—

"I dare say Sir Thomas Winthrop does wonder," said Gilbert, going perfectly white with anger. "He would give the world to buy the plot himself and build cottages on it for his farm-labourers and people. Does he think I am a fool?"

"He never mentioned your name at all. It was my father of whom he was speaking, to whom the property belongs," said Michael, a shade of reserve in his tone, for it was quite true, and had struck even

him more than once, that Gilbert had a way of speaking of their estate as though it were not only managed, but owned, by himself. Michael trusted and believed in him implicitly, but was not prepared to be so sharply taken up.

“He is a meddlesome old imbecile, and I would thank him to mind his own business,” said Gilbert, who had somewhat recovered his composure. “Michael, do you trust me, or do you not?”

As he spoke, he almost pulled up, and looked his brother full in the face. Gilbert’s countenance, at this period, was an older countenance than that of Michael. His brow had already got the first coating, as it were, of the network of little fine wrinkles which afterwards completely covered it.

“Trust you? why, of course,” said Michael almost impatiently.

“Then, hearken to a word of advice. Do not let Sir Thomas Winthrop, or Sir

Thomas anybody, even speak to you of our affairs. I know what I am about when I say so. Do you think I'd discuss with any outsider the way you treat a patient? I should know that you knew a hundred times more about such things than I did, even if I might not suppose you infallible. And if you trust me to be doing the best for us all, you must not discuss what I am doing or not doing, with any mortal soul."

"I tell you I was not discussing it," said Michael, his dark brows drawing together. "Sir Thomas began. I met him as I was riding from——"

"Sir Thomas be d—d!" said Gilbert, so heartily, and with such intense emphasis, that Michael stared at him. This anger, passion, and violent language, belonged to a phase in his brother's character of which he had scarcely suspected the existence. This sudden display might have put a suspicious man on the alert, but Michael Langstroth was not suspicious; and, more-

over, he was one of those who, while they can fight the world well enough, can oppose an iron front to their enemies, and treat their detractors with careless scorn, are very tender, very weak, very sensitive where their friends and those they love are concerned. He saw only that Gilbert was vexed, and felt only that he was sorry to have been the one to vex him. So to change the subject, he said—

“Well, I should be glad enough to see the factories working again ; but I must say I wish I had a couple of thousands to start with. I would be married to-morrow.”

Gilbert, who had other views for his thousands than, to use his own phrase, “to give them to Magdalen Wynter to buy furniture with,” felt in his secret soul that love must make any man feel small ; that it might make even a generous man selfish.

“What interest could you pay ?” he asked.

Michael shrugged his shoulders, know-

ing no reply to that question ; and Gilbert, in the tone of a tutor, who is master of his subject, haranguing a pupil who does not know its A B C, went on : “ You are my brother, and, of course, I would like to help you first, if I could ; but we cannot afford it, Michael. We must wait. It is our only course. Marriage must wait, and prosperity must wait. To hand you out a couple of thousands now, would mean to throw our affairs back for years ; and as for my father and me—— ”

“ Oh, of course, I was joking,” said Michael carelessly. “ I know there is no royal road to that kind of thing, but only hard work, and plenty of it.”

He spoke as if he considered the subject at an end, and they rode the rest of the way in silence. Gilbert's mind was busy, and his indignation active in that he had such a mean-minded brother.

“ I verily believe he would accept the situation of overseer to the parish pump,

if it should give him fifty pounds a year, and bring him any nearer being married to that doll," he thought ; and this sarcasm was, as it were, the froth or scum thrown to the surface by an anger, a fear, and an emotion which was at that time the deepest thing he could feel, and of which it was no more the adequate measure than a yard stick would be adequate for measuring an ocean. And afterwards, when this first ebullition of feeling was over, he fell to brooding over the matter in a way which was inevitable from his nature and temperament, as well as from his upbringing, and the lines in which his life had been cast.

"What will become of my work," he asked himself, as he often had asked himself lately, "if my father were to die, as he might, any day? If he were to die, and everything were to be divided! All that I have scraped together with such toil, for so many years. One-half of it as good as flung into the gutter. Where would my

wages be then? Michael is not fit to have control over money which has been earned by some one else. He does not understand the subject, and never will. He would take his share, marry that girl—if she would have him—and leave me with my life to begin over again. As for the factories, if he is fool enough to listen to Sir Thomas Winthrop, and repeat what he says, as if it were something worth thinking about—why, if he can do that, he is capable of following out Sir Thomas's ideas too. It is enough to disgust any man, and discourage him from anything like real work," Gilbert went on to himself, "to think he has so precarious a hold as I have upon things which would not be existing now, but for his devotion. One ought to have some more secure prospect, if only to give one a little heart in one's exertions."

Long after they had parted and gone their separate ways, Gilbert was silent, revolving this problem in his mind; and

the more he thought about it, the bigger and uglier it grew.

“Michael cares for nothing but to gratify his own wishes and impulses,” Gilbert thought, darkly, feeling that this tendency of Michael’s interfered disagreeably with certain plans and projects of his own, which he did not recognize as proceeding from the same source.

After that, the conversations between them on such matters grew ever rarer and less expansive. Michael did not dwell on the matter, and, if he had thought about it, would have been too proud to allude to it after Gilbert had asked him whether he trusted him ; and something, whether pride or another feeling, hindered Gilbert from opening out. Every day he grew more sedate, and his brow became grayer and more covered with its network of little fine wrinkles.

CHAPTER VI.

GILBERT'S "COUP DE THEATRE."

TOWARDS the end of every hunting season, those men in Bradstane and its vicinity who belonged to the institution known as the Tees Valley Hunt, were in the habit of meeting at the King's Arms in Bradstane, and there partaking together of a luncheon, at which Sir Thomas Winthrop, the master, presided, and after which he read out the statistics of the past season, and laid before the assembled company any proposed new arrangements for the following year. Nothing was decided then; a regular meeting was called, to be held a week later, in which the affairs were discussed in earnest, and real business was

done. It had come to pass with the lapse of years, that the gathering had become a very sociable one, dear to the hearts of those who partook in it; and they would not have given it up on any account.

This luncheon usually took place in the beginning of March, and was often a good deal talked about before it came off. It had been December when the meeting took place between Magdalen and Gilbert, during which each had silently given credit to the other for much keenness and acuteness of observation. It had been cold and inclement then, and a long bleak winter had followed, during which the interview had not been repeated—at least, no such meeting as that. It may be that Gilbert had many a time ridden over the wild road leading from Bradstane to Middleton-in-Teesdale, for it was his habit daily to take a long walk or a long ride. He may have travelled over this road, solitary and sedate, as his wont and

humour were, his lips moving now and then, when he felt himself to be quite alone on the silent roads, as if he whispered to himself endless calculations, but never too absorbed to recognize an acquaintance and acknowledge him if he met him—never too abstracted to know his own whereabouts amidst the moors and commons, or intricate cross-country roads.

And it is more than probable that Magdalen, on her part, had many a dozen times paced that woodland path on which Gilbert had found her, trying, by the regular mechanical motion which, in her own mind, she compared with that of a treadmill, to grind down or pace out some of the suppressed savageness and discontent which gnawed her soul. This walking to and fro was almost her only mode of taking outdoor exercise. With all her veiled eagerness, her bitter sense of the consuming dulness of her life, she never left the Balder Hall grounds on foot,

never sought any companionship with outside things or people. For her there were no long rambles, no casual, friendly greeting with farm or cottage folk whom she might see on the way.

This seclusion on her part was a subject on which she and Michael had occasional differences of opinion, which could hardly be called disputes, since Magdalen was in the habit of yielding the field at once to Michael in the matter of argument, merely telling him that no doubt he was quite right, and simply refusing to change her ways because she did not choose to do so.

"It is too bad of you," said he, "when there is so much work crying out to be done. I could find you plenty of employment in Bridge Street, and one or two other slums."

"I haven't a doubt of it. I feel not the slightest vocation for anything of the kind."

"It is bad to sit aloft in meaningless exclusiveness."

"I dare say it is. It is the only kind of thing I care for, here. I hate district visiting, and people who make themselves common, too."

"You could not make yourself common if you tried, and it would put more interest into your life."

"No, it would disgust me; that would be all. Every night I should think of all the horrid scenes and horrid people I had seen in the day. I should be always seeing you mixed up with them, and I should get to think you as horrid as they were—you need not look at me in that way. It's my nature. . . . Oh, I dare say you are quite right, Michael—indeed, you always are—but I don't take any interest in those things, and I don't want to. I prefer to remain as I am."

"As I am," was exquisite enough in its refinement, hauteur, and beauty. Had

any one else so spoken, Michael would clearly have discerned, and probably pointed out, an odious spirit of pride and exclusiveness. As it was Magdalen, he thought, certainly, that she was unreasonable, but he found the unreasonableness agreeable; he liked the shape which it took—that of fastidiousness—and was not disposed to quarrel with it. The rare and wonderful creature was his own; he had never even yet felt as if he fairly understood that fact, or could think enough of it. He suggested, with a smile lighting up the dark gravity of his face, that he should drive her round some day in his dog-cart, when he had not many places to call at. She slightly lifted her eyebrows, and drew out the silk with which she was embroidering.

“No, sir. When you have a half-holiday, and wish to devote it to me, I will drive you out, or ride with you. At other times—I know it is not intellectual,

or humane, but it is so—I prefer the wood-walk in the park; I will remain at home."

She did remain at home, and took her monotonous strolls along the woodland path, or might now and then be seen, alone, in an open carriage, pale and tranquil and indifferent-looking, enveloped in her dark furs and feathers, with a huge light-gray fur rug filling up the rest of the carriage, and this even on days when the wind was keen and the frost biting. She was well aware that not one woman in twenty could have driven about Bradstane in winter, in an open carriage, without her countenance assuming rainbow hues. She could drive thus, and return home without a red nose or blue cheeks; and it gave her a negative, cynical pleasure to do it, and watch other people on foot, or sealed up in stuffy broughams with both windows shut.

The evening before the luncheon

already spoken of, Michael was with her, and she asked him if he were going to be present at it.

"No," said he; "I'm engaged at the time, but Gilbert is going."

"Gilbert! why, he surely does not generally go."

"No, but he seems to take more interest in sport since he became such a chum of Askam's; and, of course, *he* will be there."

"Ah, of course," said Magdalen.

"Of all the queer partnerships I ever knew, that one is the queerest," added Michael reflectively.

"Do you think so? It seems to me the most natural thing in the world. Would you have had Gilbert take up with a nobody?"

"My dear Magdalen! I was going to say, a nobody would be better than Otho Askam; but as he's a friend of yours, too, I suppose there are excellences in

him which my baser vision can't perceive. And I know what you mean by 'nobody.' That's poor Roger Camm. Well, I'll leave you your friend, if you'll leave me mine."

"I have not the slightest desire to know anything about Mr. Roger Camm—certainly not to interfere with him," replied Magdalen coldly. Michael merely smiled the sweet smile which Magdalen, in her heart of hearts, considered insipid, and the discussion ended.

At two o'clock on the following afternoon, some forty men, young and old, sat down at the long table, in the great room at the "King's Arms." The so-called "lunch" was, in fact, a very substantial dinner, as such luncheons are wont to be. Sir Thomas Winthrop sat at one end of the table, and at the other was a very young man, called Lord Charles Startforth, representing his father. Every family of standing in all the country-side had

sent a representative, and every man present was more or less acquainted with every other member of the company.

At Sir Thomas's right hand sat Otho Askam, with a cross look in his eyes, and a more sullen expression than usual on his brow and mouth. Sir Thomas was a very worthy, honourable gentleman, ready to take a paternal interest in any young man of promise; but he was not a student of character, nor acute in reading the silent language of expression, as seen on a human face. From Otho's quietness, and his monosyllabic answers to the remarks made to him, Sir Thomas augured a milder mood than usual, and resolved that now or never was the time for him to say his say; for he had on his mind "a few words" intended for Otho's ear—words which he had succeeded in convincing himself it was his duty to say. On the opposite side, a little lower down, sat Gilbert Langstroth, and next to him was Byrom Winthrop.

As the wine went round, the talk grew faster and freer. Men saw each other to-day who had, perhaps, not met for some time past, and these meetings called up recollections, brought out questions, to which the expansiveness of the moment produced confidential answers.

At the end of the table over which Lord Charles Startforth presided, a discussion suddenly began about some of those who sat near Sir Thomas Winthrop.

"What a lowering face that Askam has!" was the observation which began the conversation.

"His face can't be more lowering than his temper," replied some one else.

"Hah! I see there's his inseparable chum, not so far off him."

"Gilbert Langstroth, do you mean? Oh yes! He's never so far away from him. I have heard that that young man has a very long head, and would not object to going into partnership with Otho Askam

—Askam to supply the money, and Langstroth the brains.”

The other laughed. “What, on Arthur Orton’s plan, do you mean? ‘Some people plenty money and no brains, and other people plenty brains and no——’”

“Oh, come! That’s too bad. Langstroth is a gentleman.”

“I never said he wasn’t, that I know of. Gentlemen have got to live, like other people, though these radicals” (with a growl) “seem to grudge us our very existence.”

“Oh, hang all radicals! You say Langstroth is a gentleman—Gilbert, I mean. His brother is, at any rate. I don’t know a better fellow anywhere.”

“No, nor I.” The assent was general. Then some one else said—

“He doesn’t seem to get married.”

“No; that engagement has been hanging on far too long.”

A slight pause, and then, leaning con-

fidentially forward, the first speaker said—

“Somebody else doesn't seem to get married, either.”

A sort of smile went round. Then Lord Charles, with the rash candour of youth, made the remark aloud which every one else had been making in his own mind.

“I wonder if Michael Langstroth knows that every one says Otho Askam is sweet upon his intended?”

One man shrugged his shoulders.

“If he did know, what could he do, or say?”

“I don't know what he could say, I'm sure; but what he could do would be to get married to her at once.”

Here a rather timid-looking young man, who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation, joined in, with a slight stammer—

“If he had to marry her like that, it

would be all spoiled for him. He t-trusts her."

"Ah, yes ; very beautiful of him," said a sceptical spirit ; and then a feeling seemed to prevail that the talk had gone far enough in that direction. Indeed, the conversation at the other end of the table had become somewhat loud, and the speakers with whom we have been concerned began to look and listen what it was all about.

What had taken place was this. Sir Thomas Winthrop, good gentleman, feeling his heart warmed within him, took advantage of much loud talk around him to address a few words to Otho Askam.

"I'm glad to see you with us to-day, Mr. Askam."

"Thank you," said Otho, with his wooden bow.

"I hope you found the sport to your liking," added the baronet. "We consider

it has been rather a good season, on the whole."

"It has been nothing to complain of," was the gracious reply.

Encouraged by this admission, Sir Thomas filled his glass, and said—

"I hope this will not be the last time, by many, that we shall meet on an occasion like this."

Again Otho bowed stiffly, drank his glass of wine, and gave ear to Sir Thomas, as he proceeded—

"I'm glad to see you and Gilbert Langstroth so thick. He's a very intelligent young man."

"Rather!" observed Otho emphatically, with a nod, and what would have been a wink, only he remembered in time that such a testimony to Gilbert's intelligence might be thought rather compromising than otherwise by his interlocutor. In his own mind, and speaking to Gilbert in his own language, Otho called Sir Thomas "a

rum old party, and green as grass, you know," and this private opinion, which he held very strongly, rendered it a little difficult to him to meet the other now on equal terms.

Sir Thomas went on—

"He has behaved in a very admirable way to his father, and I always like to see that in a youth. He has almost retrieved their affairs, which were in a deplorable condition."

His voice took a confidentially funereal tone, and he shook his head.

"Yes, I know," said Otho vaguely, and at this juncture he caught Gilbert's eye, and indulged in the luxury of the wink, which, in regard to Sir Thomas, he had had to suppress. Gilbert's countenance did not alter a jot, but he became watchful.

"Of course," resumed Sir Thomas, for whom the subject appeared to have a fatal fascination, "a young man, who has had to do battle with reverses, as he has, is apt

to think his affairs are the centre of the universe, and that every one else is as much concerned in them as he is himself."

To this Otho said nothing, but he regarded Sir Thomas with a curious, bulldog expression.

"I'm afraid he is just a little rash in some things," Sir Thomas went on. "For instance, there's that property by the river — those Townend mills. I have heard that he is bent upon setting them to work again." And as Otho made no reply, "Do you know if he has any project of that kind?"

In the fulness of his heart and head he had not moderated his tones sufficiently; and, as the loud conversation about them had somewhat lulled, this question was distinctly audible, not only to Otho, but to many others, even so far down as where Gilbert Langstroth and Byrom Winthrop sat. The former, though no names had been spoken, knew with unerring cer-

tainty, that it was himself to whom the baronet alluded ; and Byrom Winthrop said within himself, " If only I were near enough to stop the governor ! He's perfectly infatuated about those factories of Gilbert Langstroth's, and he'll go and say something he ought not to."

Otho's answer came quite distinctly too, in bluff, curt tones.

" I can't inform you on that topic. All I know of it was told me in confidence."

" Quite right, quite right !" said Sir Thomas, with the fatuity of an elderly gentleman, in whom a solid meal, judiciously mingled with sound wine, has developed the sense of benevolence to an abnormal degree. " That's only just and honourable. But listen to me. Your father was a friend of mine ; therefore, I may be allowed to say a word to you. Don't be incautious, my young friend." Byrom Winthrop's eyes were fixed in an agony of apprehension upon his father, as

he marked the rubicund visage beaming with too much amiability, and saw the finger raised; the eye, earnest, but unobservant, fixed upon Otho; and heard these words—for the conversation around had almost ceased—"Don't let Gilbert Langstroth, or any one else, let you in for something you don't know the end of. Take my word for it, Bradstane is not the site for a manufacturing town; and gentlemen like us had better keep clear of factories. The best thing to do with those mills would be to pull them down, and build cottages where they stand; and if you sink any money in the concern, stick to that, stick to that!"

He leaned back in his chair with a smile, a fatuous smile, upon his visage. It was perfectly evident to the meanest observer, that Sir Thomas Winthrop had become—cheerful, and that he had just said a very uncomfortable kind of thing; not that there might not be plenty of truth

in the thing, but to have said it aloud was truly unfortunate.

Gilbert Langstroth had started up, his face pale, and was leaning forward, with compressed lips, apparently about to speak. Byrom Winthrop said in his ear—

“Don’t make a row, Gilbert. You know the word ‘manufactures’ always sets him off. It means nothing.”

Then a thing happened which no one was prepared for. Otho Askam, looking round, observed—

“I see a lot of you have heard what Sir Thomas has been saying. All I can say is, I did not bring on the discussion; but now that it is on, I’d have every man here know that Gilbert Langstroth is my friend; and whoever says a word against him, says it against me. The business that Sir Thomas speaks of, has been mentioned between us. I wanted to help him with it, and he wouldn’t let me—if you call that ‘letting me in for some-

thing that I can't see the end of.' He said it was a risky thing for my money. I say, d—n the risk! He's welcome to half of all that I've got, and if he does not choose to take it, why, I say he does not know what friendship is. Shake hands, Gilbert."

Gilbert had been listening, white and breathless. Sir Thomas, in feeble despair, was protesting, in the futile way common to people who have stirred up a riot without having the least idea how to quell it, that really, it was most unfortunate. He never meant—he had no idea; and so forth.

Gilbert suddenly turned upon him, with his blue-gray eyes flashing from his pale face.

"I do not know what ideas you may have had, sir, nor what you meant, but it is not the first time you have attacked me, and said ill things of me behind my back. You tried to set my own brother against

me on this very subject. You will pardon my presumption in saying it, but upon my word I cannot see what our family affairs are to you. I have fought my father's battle, and that for my brother and myself, without appealing to you for help. But," he added, with a sudden change of tone which went subtly home to his hearers, "you have done me a good turn to-day, when you would have done me an ill one. You have shown me who *is* my friend." He struck his hand into that of Otho, which was still held out, and looked him full in the face. "I hear what you say, Askam, and as long as I live I shall not forget that you have stood by me while my father's friend and your father's friend maligned me to you. I think I will say good afternoon," he added, as a stinging parting shaft to Sir Thomas. "It would be embarrassing for us both to remain, and it is fitter that I should leave than you."

With which, and with a slight and per-

fectly self-possessed bow to Sir Thomas and the assembled company, he departed, and Otho Askam with him.

This scene, of course, made a great sensation, and that night was reported far and wide, throughout many miles of Yorkshire and Durham. Every man agreed in saying that Sir Thomas Winthrop was apt to become too expansive on these occasions, and that they hoped it would be a lesson to him. As to Gilbert and Otho, and their behaviour, opinions differed. Men spoke of their parts in the fray according to their own feelings and dispositions, some saying that it was a touching example of faith and friendship, others leaning to the opinion that Otho Askam, in to-morrow's stingy fit, would repent him of his reckless generosity to-day; while one observer said—

“I suppose there was something real in it. I'm sure there was on Askam's side, at any rate; but that Gilbert Langstroth is

a queer fellow. I'm certain, if you could see to the bottom of his heart, you would find gratitude to Sir Thomas for having given him such a chance. It was very telling, that slightly trembling voice, and that little side stroke about having fought their battles alone, and without asking Sir Thomas's help. It made Sir Thomas look confoundedly foolish, and as if he had been doing a very mean thing."

"And don't you think he had?"

"Certainly not. He had been doing what he thought was the very best for everybody, and in the most disinterested way. Only, you know, he hates what he calls tradespeople like poison; and the idea of knocking Gilbert's factories on the head was just too much for him."

"Well, I'm much mistaken if he has not given them a good push towards a fresh start."

"I quite agree with you." And there was a laugh at the expense of Sir Thomas.

The poor gentleman hid his diminished head that night, and it was not till the following morning that he had so far revived as to be able to take a tone of dignified bitterness, and grave satire on his own good-nature. "Selfishness," he informed Lady Winthrop, "was the only policy that paid, and never again would he commit the mistake of offering disinterested advice to young men, even though they might be the sons of his oldest friends."

It never transpired what passed between Gilbert and Otho at any private interview after this scene, but it was not very long afterwards, that Gilbert, with a tranquil smile on his face, sat down to his desk and wrote the following letter :—

"DEAR ROGER,

"Do you remember, when you were staying with us, my taking you down to the end of the town, to look at those two factories? And I asked you if you

would come and manage them, supposing I ever got them to work again. You said you would, if you were not tied down to something else, or in a much better position. Michael tells me you are still in the same place, and not too well satisfied with it. I am going to claim your promise. My friend, Otho Askam, has bought the mills ; at least, an arrangement has been made by which they will most likely become his in time, unless they pay so well that we can afford to repay him his advances. He entrusts the whole direction of them to me, and I intend to spin jute in them, as I told you before. I should like to have your aid and counsel as soon as ever you can give them to me. I hope you have not changed your mind, and that you will not think the salary too small. We find that we cannot offer you more than £120 to begin with, but it would be advanced on the first possible opportunity ; and with the increasing prosperity of the

concern the manager would get more, and eventually have a share in the business, if it should turn out worth anything ; and I intend that it shall so turn out. I need not say that we will guarantee that you lose nothing in a pecuniary point of view, if you are willing to help us to start a new thing. I cannot say fairer than that ; and in the hope that I may very soon receive your assent to this proposition, to be followed by your speedy arrival, I remain,

“Yours faithfully,

“GILBERT LANGSTROTH.”

The result of this letter was, that within six weeks of its having been written, there lounged into the library of the Red Gables one afternoon an immensely tall, broad-shouldered young man, with a great shock of loose black hair ; a pale, rough-hewn, plain face, clever and attractive ; and with a wonderfully delicate forehead—a young man who was in

the habit of saying the roughest kind of things in the softest of voices. This was Roger Camm, the former friend and play-fellow of the two Langstroths when they had all been boys together. According to his own account, he had turned himself into a working man in order to save his own self-respect, and because he had no affection for the Church, which had treated his father so scurvily. According to Michael Langstroth, he was the best and truest friend that ever a man had. And according to Gilbert, he was a shrewd, "level-headed" man of business, who was going to help him to set his factories going, and, incidentally, set his, Gilbert's, fortunes going in the right direction.

"Here I am," was Roger Camm's laconical greeting.

"And not before you were wanted," replied Gilbert, rising to meet him with outstretched hand and his sweetest smile. "You are welcome as flowers in May."

"That shows my value to be high," said Roger. "There are not many to be found, then, in these latitudes. Where am I to put up till I find rooms?"

"Why, here, of course. Everything is ready for you. But I believe Michael expects you to dine with him to-night."

Thus Roger Camm was, as it were, inducted into his new position. He told himself that night, before he went to sleep, that it was odd that his life's course should bring him back to Bradstane, the little country market-town which he despised; and that his lot, at a critical period, should again be cast in with these others whom he had known when young, but from whom he had believed himself to be, practically, finally severed when he had left his native place to begin work in a great city.

CHAPTER VII.

MICHAEL, ROGER, GILBERT.

TALKING with Michael one day, soon after his arrival, on the subject of the factories, Roger discovered to his surprise that his friend strongly disapproved of the enterprise.

"I am not one of the company, you may be very sure," he said.

"I wish I had known. I would have taken care to have nothing to do with it," cried Roger, perturbed.

"On the contrary, I am very glad you have something to do with it. I have more confidence in it since you came. I dare say my reasons for disliking it may

sound quite absurd. I know they are not business-like. I dislike Askam, and I think the friendship between him and Gilbert is quite unnatural. The more I see of him the more convinced I am of this. I know for a fact that Otho Askam took the thing up out of pure speculative-ness, for an adventure, partly to please Gilbert, who has got a wonderful influence over him, but chiefly to vex Sir Thomas Winthrop," and Michael briefly recounted the scene which had taken place at the King's Arms. "After that, nothing would satisfy Otho but to get the thing started at once. I don't believe in the stability of an enterprise built upon any such foundation, though I have no doubt Gilbert will push it through, if it is to be done. He says he is quite satisfied with things as they are. Let them be! I am glad you get anything good out of it."

Roger said nothing to this, but he watched Michael when he could do so

unobserved, and he became very thoughtful. He saw that his friend's face was thinner, and his smile less frequent than it had been. There was a little fold between his eyebrows, telling of a mind not always at ease. These changes had taken place in two years, though Michael had been, in a small way, getting on in the world.

Six busy months passed, during which Roger had his work cut out for him, and so much of it, that he could scarce compass each day's task in its allotted time. The labour was severe, the pay was not very large; the enterprise was a risky one. But he was one of those organizations which seem to thrive and feed on hard work and herculean exertions as others do on meat and recreation; he enjoyed it all, and it seemed to put new life into him. It really looked as if Gilbert's little boast to Otho in past days, that if he did not know how to manage mills, he did under-

stand how to manage men, were literally true, so perfectly was this new-comer of his selection suited for the task offered to him. The stiffer the work, the higher did his spirits rise. The employment was varied, too. It was not as if he had entered upon a business which was ready and in smooth working order. The whole concern wanted "floating," in a small way, and on him fell the burden of doing it. There was not only the new machinery to see about—which Roger thoroughly understood, and into the details of which he went with the zeal of an enthusiast—there were also the repairs necessary to the buildings themselves, after standing so many years empty and idle; to the boilers and the engines, all of which it took time and money to set in order. Then there was the getting together a sufficient number of hands, chiefly women and girls, most of them out of Bridge Street, some from one or two of the neigh-

bouring villages; and again, some skilled artisans from Barrow-in-Furness, to instruct the novices in their work; and all this had to be done with the utmost economy possible. It was an enormous task, which pleased Roger greatly; and while he was working at it, he had no time to spare, even for Michael.

When he had come to Bradstane, there had been a question about where he was to live. This was settled by Dr. Rown-tree, who said—

“Come to the barrack, and put up with Michael and me.”

Roger hesitated a little at first, but there was no mistaking the sincerity of the doctor's wish, and the young man was very willing to be persuaded; for, to tell the truth, there was no one in the world in whose proximity he loved so well to be as in that of Michael Langstroth. He therefore soon allowed his scruples to be overcome, and so was formed this odd

triangular household of bachelors, old and young, and hard work was the order of the day.

While Roger was full of business, and seeming to grow heartier and stronger the more he had to do, Michael, he noticed, when he had time to notice him, was a good deal quieter and staidier than he once had been; not with the dulness of discontent, it would seem, nor of depression, but, so far as Roger could make out, just with the quietness which comes to nearly all men, as life lays gradually increasing burdens upon them. Roger sometimes wondered if his long engagement pressed upon Michael, but at the sound of Magdalen's name there always crossed his face that expression which, the first time Roger had seen it, had wrung his heart, because it had told him that a spell stronger than friendship had taken possession of Michael's being. They did not talk about such things, or "confide" in each other—

such is not the way of men's friendships, nor, perhaps, of any deep friendships ; and then, Michael, with his outwardly urbane and gracious manner, was deeply reserved on personal matters ; and Roger, for all his rough exterior, and oftentimes untutored tongue, had what is called, and very generally miscalled, "the tact of a woman," in regard to such topics.

But Michael had on one or two occasions, when something had stirred him more than usual, let fall a few words as to his own inner experiences, which Roger had treasured up, and rightly so, as evidences of more than brotherly regard, and of an entire confidence in him on Michael's part.

Speaking one day about an illness of old Miss Strangforth, which had been serious, and in which both he and Dr. Rowntree had been attending her, there was a shade on Michael's brow, and a worried, worn look on his face.

"Is Miss Strangforth likely to die,

Michael?" asked Roger, roused to a sudden interest in the matter.

"Oh no! At least, I most sincerely trust not. No; we will pull her through this time."

"Miss Wynter is helping to nurse her, of course?"

"Yes, of course—like an angel."

"I should be afraid it was rather close work for her."

"They have a trained nurse to do the hardest part of it; and she is strong. Magdalen is very strong," Michael repeated to himself in a meditative kind of way. "And, of course, she does what I tell her about air and exercise, and all that. I hope it won't injure her."

"Well, she has the best of all possible safeguards in having you there," said Roger, with a smile, which was, perhaps, a little forced.

He had intended his remark to be a cheering one, but, to his surprise, Michael's

answer was a deep sigh. This was enough to rouse Roger's uneasiness. Holding his pipe suspended, he asked, anxiously, "Michael, what's up? Are you in trouble?"

"It's only that what you say reminds me that I am no safeguard at all for her," he said dejectedly. "I sometimes think what a selfish brute I was, ever to speak to her. If I had held my tongue and kept out of the way, she might have been married by now, to some man who could really have been that protector, which I can only seem to be. After all, what can I do for her? I cannot save her from experiences like this. I cannot justly afford to marry, for several years to come. It would be gross selfishness to take her away from Balder Hall to any such place as I could give her. And yet, if Miss Strangforth were to die—she is so old, and so feeble—if she were to die, there would be nothing else left."

“And a great deal too good for her,” was the silent comment in Roger’s bosom. He found Michael’s remarks very difficult to answer. He had an idea, whether right or wrong, that Magdalen, whom he could not love, let him strive never so loyally for his friend’s sake to do so, was not the frail and timid creature that Michael seemed to imagine her. Roger felt sure that the idea as to the impropriety of removing her from Balder Hall to a humbler abode was hers, not Michael’s. He felt sure she did not stand in much need of guardianship, but was well able to fight her own battles and take care of herself. He heard all the gossip about Michael and Miss Wynter, which, of course, never penetrated to their ears; heard, too, Gilbert’s frequent scathing strictures on his future sister-in-law. He knew all about Otho Askam’s frequent visits to Balder Hall. So did Michael; but then, Roger knew what was said about those visits.

He remarked at last, with the cowardice characteristic of us all in such cases, and, perhaps, also with a shrewd inkling that it would not be of much use to speak differently—

“Of course, it is hard lines, Michael, having to wait so long. But even if you were married to-morrow, you can’t forbid care and trouble to come to either her or you. There are no lives without them. But Miss Wynter is a brick, I know” (this with great emphasis, as he felt anything but sure of it); “she ought to be proud of waiting for you, and I expect she is.”

“Do you know,” said Michael, with the air of a man who announces something which will surprise his hearer, “I believe that if she were not engaged to me, Otho Askam would propose to her to-morrow.”

Roger looked at him with parted lips. Michael evidently thought the news would be as great a discovery to his friend as it had been to himself.

"Well," observed Roger shortly, "you don't mean to say you think that would be to her advantage?"

"Perhaps not, in some ways; but——"

"Not in any one way," almost shouted Roger, bringing his fist on to the table with a thump. "That would be Hyperion to a satyr, without the shadow of a doubt."

"I know nothing about that," said Michael, still in the same dejected tone, "but I do know that she is all the world to me, and I cannot give her up; no, by Heaven, I cannot!"

He spoke with a flurry, an agitation, and a passion, most unlike his usual even cheerfulness.

"Give her up? Who wants you to?"

"No one. It's only my own conscience that sometimes suggests what I ought to do."

"If your conscience suggests that, it is deceitful, and a blind guide. But come, Michael, old fellow, you are morbid to

talk in this way. The idea of a man of six and twenty looking at things so darkly ! Absurd ! You have your life before you."

He went on talking in this strain till he saw the cloud gradually clear from Michael's brow, and heard him admit that he was sure he must be a fool ; and so, begin to look a little brisker.

But Roger was thoughtful as he went about his work.

"Give her up !" he said to himself. "He'll never give her up till she flings him off. Poor Michael ! That is the only cure for him ; and perhaps it wouldn't be one, after all. Should I be brute enough to wish it for him ?"

And then he thought about the change in Michael's face, so altered from its youthful pride and carelessness ; but, as it seemed to Roger, more beautiful now, with the graver, broader seal of manhood stamped upon it—that seal which care never lets out of her fingers, and which

she is perpetually imprinting on every brow that carries on it a line worth reading.

If Roger were concerned about the change in Michael, Michael, on his part, was much struck—concerned, is hardly the word—by what seemed to him a great alteration in Gilbert. It appeared as if hard work suited Gilbert as well as it did Roger, for the more his business grew, the livelier he became.

“Lively?” said Miss Wynter, to whom Michael had one evening been speaking on the subject.

“Yes, lively. It’s the only word I can find with which to describe the change; and I don’t wonder that you exclaim at it, for ‘lively’ is hardly a word that fits Gilbert, is it?”

“No, indeed! Pray, what shape does the liveliness take?” asked Magdalen, who appeared almost interested.

“Oh, I can hardly tell you. A quick-

ness and alertness—I can hardly describe it. He makes jokes sometimes, and laughs at a mere nothing—which is not Gilbert's way, you know, as a rule. He talks a great deal, too, which is also contrary to his usual habits. He takes my arm if we meet, and altogether there is something odd and changed in his manner."

"Perhaps he is in love," suggested Magdalen languidly.

Michael shrugged his shoulders, smiling slightly.

"He may be, but I don't think it." And so the topic dropped, till Michael returned to the town, and during the evening related this supposition of Magdalen's.

"I don't know whether he's in love or not," said the doctor, who, for his part, was certainly not in love with Gilbert; "but he was in here to-day to see you, when you were out; and he says your father intends to make his will, and he wants you to know about it."

"To make his will. I should have thought he had made it long ago."

"So he did, for I was one of the witnesses; but it has to be altered, with all these complications about factories and property to be sold, and such-like."

"Oh! well, Gilbert will see to it; he has always managed that kind of thing," said Michael carelessly. "I don't see what I have to do with it."

"I should say you had a good deal to do with it. You certainly ought to look after it."

"Look after my father's will! what for? He's got no one to leave anything to, except Gilbert and me. He'll divide between us, I suppose. I should not like to think that Gilbert got less than me, seeing how he has slaved all these years in order that there may be anything to leave at all."

Dr. Rowntree looked impatient, and, Michael having left the room, the doctor

remarked to Roger, in homely phraseology, that he did not know whether to call Michael a trump, or to tell him he was a born fool, when he talked in such a way. To which Roger merely replied that he supposed men were best left to decide such matters for themselves.

“I mistrust that Gilbert ; he is too sly for me,” said the doctor.

“He has a quiet way. I don’t think he is exactly sly,” answered Roger, and the subject of their conversation came in at the moment. Michael, he was told, was in the study, and he went there and briefly told him again what Mr. Langstroth thought of doing.

“All right,” said Michael, examining some substance under his microscope with the intensest interest. “So that he leaves as much to you as to me, I’m agreeable. I hope we shan’t have to read it for a long time to come.”

Gilbert cast a look of anger, contempt,

and wonder, mixed, towards Michael, who did not even see it. There was a short silence, till Gilbert observed, in a constrained voice—

“Well, remember, I am not answerable for anything he does.”

“Does !” echoed Michael, his attention at last thoroughly aroused ; “when you say ‘does’ in that way, you mean ‘does’ something wrong. What could or should he do against his own sons ? Have you any idea that he means to do something unjust to us ?”

“No ; oh no !” A pause. “But it is an important thing. He told me he meant to make this will, and I was determined he should not do it till I had told you. Of course, he does not dream of leaving his property away from us. Why should he, as you say ?”

Michael, still peering into his microscope, was quite unaware that close beside him a brother man stood, who had

wrestled with spiritual agencies, and had been defeated, during the last two minutes.

"Our father has his faults, like most people," pursued Michael reflectively; "but I never heard any one accuse him of injustice or meanness. He wouldn't be likely to leave his property to a charitable institution, for instance?"

"Of course not," said Gilbert impatiently.

"Well, then, I really don't see that we need, or, indeed, can say anything about it. In fact, I shall not," he added, looking up rather suddenly at his brother, as if he had all at once seen the thing in a new light, and arrived at a clear decision. "He is my father, and I trust him. For heaven's sake, Gilbert, don't get to distrusting people, or you may make yourself miserable for ever. Take my advice, old fellow, and let him alone."

"Yes," said Gilbert slowly. "I think

that, as you say, it will be best to leave him alone."

He said scarcely anything more, and soon went away.

"A pretty fool he is!" he sneered to himself, when he was outside, as he walked up and down the pavement in front of their house, smoking an ante-prandial pipe. "Lord! what with 'hearts,' and not distrusting any one, and respecting the aged (who are usually fools), my brother Michael is likely to lose the use of what little reason he has, it seems to me. There never was an elephant with a denser head than he has. He has eyes like a hawk's, and mine are more like those of a boiled codfish; but I think I know which pair can see furthest into a stone wall."

The next morning Michael called at the Red Gables, and found his father alone. He had been reflecting upon Gilbert's words, it would seem, for he

presently said to Mr. Langstroth that he had heard he intended making a new will. His father assented, and Michael observed, "If Gilbert had not told me, sir, as if it had been a thing you rather wished me to know, I should never have mentioned it, of course. But since he did, I just want to say one thing. Whatever prosperity we have is due to Gilbert. He, more than I, has been the eldest son. It is just due to circumstances, I suppose, that it has been so ; but I would not like it to be forgotten."

"I do not forget what Gilbert has been, and is to me, nor the qualities he has displayed," was Mr. Langstroth's reply ; and Michael went away with his mind at ease, feeling that he had discharged his duty.

The day after that, Gilbert, who had not seen his brother in the interim, ordered his horse early. Mr. Langstroth asked him fretfully where he was going.

"Only for a little ride," said Gilbert; "and, by the way, Coningsby is coming at eleven. You told me to tell him, and I did."

"Shan't you be here?" asked his father, in a tone almost of dismay.

"Well, no, I think not," replied Gilbert, with his sweetest smile. "It would hardly do. But if you have not quite made up your mind, I could send him word——"

"Oh, no, no! My mind is quite made up—quite. Let him come."

"I think it would be best," said the considerate son. "Good morning. I hope it won't tire you much." With which he went out.

The "little ride" prolonged itself indefinitely, as it seemed. Far along the hard, white moorland roads he went, past Middleton-in-Teesdale, a road which seemed to have some peculiar fascination for him, since he chose it oftener than any other. On he went, till he got to High

Force and its solitary wayside inn. Here he dismounted, to have his horse watered ; for himself, when they asked him what he would take, he said, "Nothing," and thanked them. To let his horse stand awhile, he strolled down the dark, pine-shaded path, to the grand waterfall, and stood beside the river, watching dreamily the thundering surf, snowy, dazzling, brilliant in the brilliant sunshine. He stooped, took water in the hollow of his hand, and drank it. This he did several times, but without a change in the calm serenity of his expression ; and then he returned to the inn and again mounted his horse.

Riding on, he proceeded till nothing but pathless moors surrounded him, stretching lonely and bewildering in all directions. He was on the borders of Westmoreland, and now the westering sun and the lengthening shadows told him that it was time to be returning. Tranquil and quiet as ever, he did turn, and guided his tired

horse towards Bradstane. It was dark when he got in, and he trod softly, as if he imagined there might be some one ill or dead in the house. He only laid his hat aside, but did not put off his riding-coat, before he went, still in this quiet, gentle way, into the library, where he found his father alone.

"Where on earth have you been?" he said fretfully. "Michael has never been near all day, and there I was, left with Coningsby, to give all my instructions alone."

"Mr. Coningsby would hardly have been likely to take his instructions from me," said Gilbert, with his slight smile. "Then, you have got it done?"

"Yes, it is done. Rowntree and Ransom" (his servant) "witnessed it. But I want no more of such efforts. It has worn me out. . . . However, it is some satisfaction to think that things are settled as they should be."

During this speech, Gilbert had stood with his foot on the fender, and his hand held up as if to shield his face from the glow of the fire. He now observed softly—

“I will go and change my things, and be with you in a few minutes.”

When he was alone in his bedroom, he took out his handkerchief and passed it across his forehead.

“Disgusting! How overheated one gets with a long ride!” he muttered to himself.

The hall bell sounded through the house. Self-possessed Gilbert gave a great start, and became suddenly paler than usual.

“Pshaw!” he uttered aloud, the next moment; “he has his key, of course.”

But it seemed to take him some time to change his riding-clothes for the garments he usually wore in an evening. Just before he went downstairs, he seated himself on a chair at his bedside, and drew a long breath.

“Well, it had to be,” he whispered to

himself. "There was nothing else for it. And he is so dense—so dense. One must do the best. It was for the best."

Then, as if feeling himself guilty of some weakness, he drew himself together with a little shake, composed his countenance, and went downstairs. Nothing was said by father or son relative to either the ride taken by the one, or the business accomplished by the other. Quite late, Otho Askam called to smoke a pipe and have a chat about the mills and other topics. And Gilbert slept quite soundly that night.

This was May. During the summer Mr. Langstroth became somewhat stronger, and things went on in their usual course until November.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE WISDOM OF
GILBERT.

ONE afternoon, about the middle of November, Gilbert, looking in at the "bar-racks," said to Michael—

"I wish you'd give a little particular attention to my father. It strikes me that he is not so well as he ought to be, or rather, that he's worse than usual. I wonder if Rowntree would mind looking in, as well?"

"Of course, we will come. Now, do you mean? I'll go at once, and the doctor at night."

He went across to his father's house and saw him. Mr. Langstroth was certainly

very weak and unwell, but not, it seemed to Michael, seriously so. He left directions for him to be kept very quiet, and returned to his dwelling, promising that he and Doctor Rowntree would both look in during the evening.

As they sat at dinner, a messenger came hurriedly from the Red Gables, summoning them to go at once to Mr. Langstroth, who was very ill. In a very few moments they were in the house, but only to find that all was over, and that Gilbert, white and haggard-looking, was standing by the chair in which their father lay, lifeless. Gilbert said they had risen from table, and he had supported his father to his chair, into which he had sunk, dead. The young man's pallor and tremulousness were fully accounted for to Michael, by the fact of the sudden blank which must now come in his life, after his years of devoted attention to his father, who had thus so suddenly departed; and by every

•

silent sign that he knew how to give, he sought to assure Gilbert of the sympathy and fellow-feeling he experienced.

There was a hush and solemnity in both the houses during the few days which elapsed between Mr. Langstroth's death and his burial.

There was but a small following to attend him to his grave. Roger Camm and Dr. Rowntree formed a part of it, and there was Miss Strangforth's carriage, and several others sent by neighbours and friends, Otho Askam's brougham amongst them.

When it was over, the two brothers, with Dr. Rowntree and Mr. Coningsby, returned to the Red Gables. It was decided that it would be best to, as the doctor said, "get through with the business of the will," then and there, so that their minds might be free for other things.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon of

a dank, chill November day, when they parted ; and Roger Camm, with an inclination of the head to Michael, to show that he was with him in spirit, if not in the flesh, went to the doctor's house, intending there to wait lunch for him.

He went into the study, where Michael and the doctor kept their professional library, and where odd volumes of Roger's had got mixed up with treatises on medicine and surgery. He picked up a volume at haphazard, and gazed at the title of it. "Principles of Biology," it ran—"Principles of Biology"—and though he believed he was trying to read it, he was really very busy thinking thoughts—thinking of Michael ; wondering how far his father's affairs were retrieved, and if at last there were some prospect of his happiness being accomplished.

"Since he is so wrapped up in that insipid girl, and since she has not done him the kindness to throw him over before

now," Roger thought, in the pride of his own wisdom, "there's no chance of it now, since his father's death must make him more prosperous in a worldly point of view. She'll have him, sure enough. They will be married, and he—will live to repent it."

Insensibly, the book dropped, and his thoughts turned to the days of long ago ; to his comrades and their lives, and his life, and to their play in the Thorsgarth garden, in summer sunshine.

"Queer, very queer," he reflected, "that we two, who were companions then, should be chums now. I wonder what Michael will turn out ; how he will win his spurs ; what will give him the stamp of finished manhood ? for he's a dreamer yet, though he does not know it."

Then he began to think that the doctor was long a-coming, and that if he did not appear soon, he, Roger, would have to eat his lunch alone, and be off to his work.

The door opened. The doctor's parlour-maid stood there.

"If you please, sir, they've sent from Mr. Langstroth's. Mr. Michael begs you will step across at once."

Roger sprang to his feet with a vague wonder and foreboding in his mind. He soon measured the distance between the doctor's house and the Red Gables. He found the door open and a servant waiting.

"This way, sir. They are in the library."

In another moment Roger found himself in the well-known room, with the three familiar figures assembled there.

Mr. Coningsby, the lawyer, who had been present, was gone. Roger looked from one to the other of his old friends, all so silent. It was very strange, and, as he dimly felt, there was something potent, thrilling, and portentous in that silence. He looked last at Michael—why, he knew not—and when his eyes fell upon

him, he could scarcely restrain a start and an exclamation. Michael had always been noted for being so easy-going, so slow in judging others, so full of sweet-tempered charity. He did not look very much at peace with himself or the world just now. He was the first to speak.

“I sent for you, Roger,” he began, and his voice was very quiet, and very incisive. Roger hardly recognized it. “I want you to hear something I have to say. You are my friend; and a friend, as we all know, sticketh closer than a brother.”

“Can this be Michael?” Roger thought, in his bewilderment. “I fancied no one but Gilbert could sneer in that way.”

Roger had yet to learn that there is no sneer so bitter as that which is called forth by intense suffering, or a very keen sense of injustice. He thought all sneers were the products of a cynical frame of mind, or, with some persons, constitutional. But, thinking that such a tone was more like

Gilbert than Michael, he was, as it were, suddenly reminded of Gilbert's existence, and he glanced at him. He was seated in a corner of the old sofa, which had always been his favourite position; his arms were folded, his face pale, and apparently absolutely devoid of expression. Dr. Rowntree, though silent, was evidently in a state of the most cruel mental perturbation, and looked in a helpless way from one brother to the other.

"Yes, Michael," said Roger, at last. "I am ready, either to do or to let alone, as you wish. What is it?"

"Boys!" exclaimed the little doctor, unable to contain himself any longer, "before it goes any further, listen to me. Before you quarrel, before you dispute, for Heaven's sake consider! You may say things, brothers as you are, which can never be unsaid."

"That is exactly what I mean to do, sir," said Michael, turning his white face

for a moment, in the doctor's direction. Roger, loyal to the heart, could not but think in this moment, that Michael looked almost cruel. Again he did not understand that there is no feeling of hate or of cruelty so strong, and so desolating, as that called forth by spited or cheated love and trust.

"You may trust me not to dispute," the young man went on ; " I never do. Hark to me, Roger !" He turned now to Roger ; and to the latter it seemed as if all Michael's movements were stiff and mechanical, and under restraint. " My father has died, as you know, and has left a will, as you also know. He has left a good deal more money than it was expected he would—by me, at any rate. I am his eldest son ; Gilbert his youngest. I wish you to know how he has disposed of his property, and to hear what course I intend to pursue, in consequence of that disposition. Here is the will. I won't

trouble you with much of it, but I must ask you to listen to this passage."

From the will, it appeared that the Langstroth estates were now free of encumbrance. The income derived from what remained to them of it was all required, and would be for some few years, to pay off the remaining interest on some debts, of which the capital was already cleared away. Over and above, there was a clear sum of six thousand pounds, gained about a year ago by the advantageous sale of two farms and some wood, mentioned in the will. Of this, four thousand was left to Gilbert, at his absolute disposal ; three thousand, as the will stated, as his just half of the property, and another thousand as a sort of payment or indemnity for his services in retrieving the estate, which, without his care and diligence, would probably have been rather a debt than an inheritance. The other two thousand were left in trust to Gilbert, to be invested and disposed

of for Michael's benefit, and the incomes derived therefrom were to be paid to Michael by his brother; the testator declaring himself to have the greatest faith and confidence in the business abilities of his son Gilbert. The town factories would pay nothing for a long time to any one but Otho Askam, whose money had found the means of starting them again. When they should, or if they ever should begin to pay, their profits were to be equally divided between Michael and Gilbert, or, failing them, their heirs. That is, in plain terms, there was a probability that some eight or ten years hence, Michael might begin to receive an income from "Langstroth's Folly." The house called the Red Gables, situate within the township of Bradstane-on-Tees, and all the furniture, plate, pictures, china, ornaments, and all other household appendages whatsoever, save such as might be personal possessions of Gilbert, were to

go to Michael absolutely, as the eldest son.

Such was the tenor of the testament, to which Roger listened breathlessly, as Michael read them, in a low, quick, clear voice. When he had finished, he laid the will on the table again, and Roger, looking intently at his friend, saw such a look in his eyes, such agony in the drawn lines of his mouth, that he went up to him, and, laying his hand on his shoulder, asked in a low voice—

“Michael, what does it mean?”

“It means that my brother is very clever, and I am a great blockhead. I am fain to doff before his superior wisdom.”

Gilbert, his arms still folded across his chest, was looking at them, pale, calm, and seemingly self-possessed.

“Take heed of what you say, Michael,” he said quietly. “Abuse, even from——”

“I am going to do nothing but praise

and congratulate you on your great wisdom and astuteness," replied Michael, flashing a look of such trenchant contempt towards his brother, that Gilbert's own eyes sank before it. It was a new sensation for him to find himself despised by the man for whose simplicity he had always entertained such a finely ironical contempt.

"Only," resumed Michael, speaking so clearly that not a word could be lost of what he said, "it is a pity my father did not appreciate you better. He should have left you the other two thousand out and out. Unless you take pity on it, it will be useless, for I shall never touch it."

"Now, Michael, Michael, madman! Beware what you say!" cried the little doctor, stamping about, as middle-age does when cash is blasphemed or lightly spoken of.

Michael, having patiently waited till this apostrophe had been contributed to the

conversation, but who heeded it not at all, suddenly bent towards Gilbert, fixed his burning eyes upon him, and said, in a lower voice, but one which was still distinctly audible to them all—

“ *Two thousand*, Gilbert ; it is an odd coincidence. Do you remember my saying to you long ago, that if I’d two thousand to start with I would be married to-morrow—eh ? ”

Gilbert neither moved nor raised his head.

“ I know you thought that a very imprudent way of spending two thousand pounds. It seems my father must have held the same opinion, and between you, you have arranged that I should do nothing mischievous.”

Here he raised himself up again, and, turning to the others, went on—

“ I want you all to understand this. That which I am not trusted to handle for myself ; that which is confided by my

father to my younger brother to take care of, lest I should misuse it—left so by my own father, to whom I have been a dutiful and honourable son,—I take God to witness it;—that is not for me at all. I refuse to touch it. You all hear what I say?”

There was a low murmur from the doctor and Roger. Michael went on—

“That being the case, it seems that what I have left, to call my own, is my father’s house—the house in which we were both born and brought up, where we lived as brothers, without an unbrotherly thought—on my part, at least; and the house where, when I went out into the world to relieve the burden which had fallen on our affairs, I left you in my place, to tend my father; to watch over all our interests; to deal justly by me as well as by yourself——”

There was a very long pause. It seemed as if Michael, steady though his

voice had remained, were unable to finish the utterance of the thoughts that were in his mind. The others were silent, and Gilbert looked doggedly downwards.

“That house, as I say, is now all I have, but it is my own, and you have just given in the account of your stewardship,” went on Michael, his lips white and his eyes hard, so that Roger felt a kind of fear of him. “There it is !” He laid his hand upon the will. “To me, it has been a fatal stewardship. It has robbed me not only of my inheritance, but of my brother.” And he advanced two or three steps nearer to Gilbert.

The latter rose ; perhaps he knew what was to come. Neither of the others dared to speak. Gilbert once lifted his head and looked at his brother, but instantly his face sank again. He was voiceless, powerless, defenceless. Michael stepped aside and threw the door open wide.

"Being my house," he said, "I order you to leave it now, this instant. Go!"

Another pause. Silence still. Michael stood waiting. Gilbert looked around him, as if he struggled to speak, but could not. He saw nothing to cheer him. Dr. Rowntree with his hands clasped, his kind face looking the picture of woe; Roger Camm frowning and silent. Gilbert took two steps towards the door.

"Michael," he said.

"Go!" repeated Michael, in a stony voice.

Gilbert walked slowly out at the door, into the hall, took his hat, and left the house. They heard the hall door close after him, and it was with two of them, at least, as if the sound struck them like an actual blow. To turn one's brother out of doors would generally be done figuratively—morally, perhaps. Michael had done it literally, and with a resistless determination and strength of will which none of them

had credited him with. His hour had come at last, and the real stuff of which he was made, good or bad, was beginning to show itself.

After a moment's silence, he turned again to the others and said—

“ I won't detain you any longer. I wish I could have spared you such a scene, but as my two nearest friends, I wished you to be under no mistake as to what I was going to do. And now I should like to be alone for awhile.”

Roger heaved a deep sigh, and said nothing, but moved towards the door. The doctor, who had a tender heart, and down whose cheeks the tears were running, fell back into old Quaker phraseology, as he almost sobbed out—

“ Michael, my poor, poor lad, thou'll come and sleep in thy own bed to-night, at my house, won't thou ? ”

“ Yes, I will, doctor,” replied Michael slowly ; and they left him alone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GODDESS OF THE TENDER FEET.

"THE goddess Calamity is delicate, and . . . her feet are tender. Her feet are soft, he says, for she treads not upon the ground, but makes her path upon the heads of men."

These words, or something like them, were floating dimly in Roger Camm's mind, as he walked with Dr. Rowntree across the square to the house on the opposite side. His heart was full to bursting. Loving Michael as he did, better than any one in the world, he felt to the full the meaning of the summons he had received, to hear his friend's decision. It is not for a light thing that a man turns

out of doors the brother in whom he has all his life felt unqualified trust and confidence; it is not a casual acquaintance whom he summons to witness the deed, and so Roger felt. But while he quite appreciated this accident of the thing, the thing itself bewildered him even yet. It was one of those bizarre, jarring circumstances which come upon one like a clap of thunder from a cloudless sky, which one fails to take in properly on the first blush of them. Even yet, Roger could not feel at home with the recollection of Michael standing erect and stiff, the spirit of anger flaming from his eyes, deaf to every remonstrance, and casting scornful eyes upon Gilbert's pitiful condition.

Neither he nor the doctor spoke till they were in the house again. It seemed that they had been but a short time away, for there was everything as Roger had left it, and the luncheon-table set for them. This bald reality and commonplace of

everyday life did not seem to put things into any more comprehensible shape; if possible, they heightened the strangeness and sadness of the situation. But standing together there, they (to use the vernacular) "found their tongues." Dr. Rowntree sat down in his easy-chair, and wiped his eyes with a large red bandana handkerchief, blew his nose violently, and said, in a voice which was yet full of tears—

"Who would ha' thought it, Roger? who would ha' thought it?"

"Well," said Roger, propping his broad back against the mantelpiece, and staring down at his boots, "not I, for one, and I think there will be precious few to jerk their heads and say, 'I told you so,' this time. And yet I don't feel half so much surprised as enraged, now that it is all out."

"He should not have flung away what was left him in that way," complained Dr. Rowntree. "He should have been cool."

“Cool, doctor! Now, come! would you have been cool? Were you cool, as it was?”

“No, no, I know. But he ought to have kept cool. He should have carried it before a court of justice. They do set aside wills sometimes, that are flagrantly unjust; and I think they would, at any rate, have handed him over that two thousand to do as he liked with. I’m sure they would; it stands to reason. An elder son, with not a penny of cash left him, except, as you may say, at the discretion of his younger brother—monstrous, monstrous! As if he had been a spendthrift, or a ne’er-do-weel!”

“If it were twenty thousand, it would make no difference,” said Roger slowly, for he had been working the thing out in his mind. “I can see where it is. Do you suppose Michael could have got beside himself in that way, just because he was disappointed of money that he had

expected? He thinks too little of it for that. If every penny had been left at his own disposal, I have very little doubt he would have left it entirely in Gilbert's hands, for he thought all the world of his business capacities. It is the treachery, not the money. When I think how Gilbert has sneaked—sneaked, all through it——” Roger stamped his foot. “It shows you ought never to trust any one, least of all your nearest relations. Where Michael trusts, he trusts with his whole heart, just in the same way that he loves. He trusted Gilbert and he trusted his father, and they have cheated and duped him like a couple of blacklegs. I hope Master Gilbert's greed will avenge itself on his own head, and I wish a pest upon every penny of his ill-gotten inheritance. It isn't the money only that Michael has lost; it's his faith and his trust: it is his brother, that's what it is. That isn't a loss you get over in a moment, even if your brother dies; and

Michael has lost Gilbert in a worse way than if he had been burying him to-day beside their father. That's about it. He will never get over it, to be the same again."

"I'm afraid not—I'm afraid not."

"He would not be what he is if he could," said Roger.

"How can one console him?"

"Nohow. It isn't to be done."

"What can I say to him, my poor lad?"

"Nothing, if you'll believe me. I can tell you I shall not speak of it. There are things no one ought to meddle with, unless they are opened out to one. I know why he sent for me—it was in order that he might not have to enter into the whole business again. He wanted it done with, sealed up, that I might know he had no brother any more. You can't very well talk to a man of a relation he hasn't got, and I shall keep my mouth shut."

"I will try," said Dr. Rowntree; "but

if I see him looking very miserable, I don't think I can keep quiet."

"You won't see Michael looking miserable, I can tell you that. My time is up," added Roger, looking at his watch. "I must go back to my work."

He left the house, with the thought just come into his mind, "After all, I shall have to speak to him. I don't see how I can stay in this shop any longer, after the treatment he has had."

He turned into the office, but it was with difficulty that he succeeded in giving any attention to his work; for in his mind's eye he had the image of Michael, seated alone in his desolation in that wretched room, where the wretched scene of the morning had taken place. It seemed to Roger that the worst blow had befallen Michael which by any possibility could overtake him—which idea serves sweetly to illustrate his own extreme ignorance of life, and of the protean forms which calamity

and misfortune can assume ; also of the marvellously elastic nature of the human creature, and of that part of it, be it brain, or heart, or soul, or whatsoever it may in reality be, which suffers.

Roger Camm, repeating to himself the half-forgotten Greek of his quotation about the goddess Calamity, never dreamed for a moment but that she had stayed her course. Surely her feet had pressed with sufficient weight upon the head which she had selected as her standpoint ! Could his spiritual eye have pierced that veil, filmy, and yet dense, which envelops us as we move to and fro on this earth, and seen the guiding powers about Michael, he would have perceived still hovering amongst them a dark form with a woebegone countenance—her of the tender feet yet.

He returned to Dr. Rowntree's from his work, and, having no heart to amuse himself in any way outside, sat with a book, to which he gave but a divided attention,

wondering the while whether Michael would go to Magdalen that night, or wait till the morrow ; and wondering likewise whether she would be of any use to him in the crisis.

“Gilbert would be a better spec. for her now,” said Roger bitterly, within himself. “Only, not to blacken him more than is absolutely necessary, he never had the faintest fancy for her. In fact, I don’t believe he would take her with fifty thousand down.”

Towards ten o’clock Michael came in, greeted them both with great composure, took his accustomed chair, lighted his pipe, and made some few observations to them before they all went to bed. He made not the slightest allusion to what had taken place in the morning, and Roger did not choose or wish to break upon this reserve : the little doctor did not dare. He found, what he had never suspected before, that his adopted son had the power of holding

him at arm's length, and while he could not but admire what seemed to him Michael's strength and self-possession, he was not quite happy at finding it thus, as it were, used against himself. This dry-eyed composure, this something indescribable in voice and glance, were, thought the doctor, magnificent, but they did not invite to the sentimental reflections of which he was longing to disburden himself.

They separated at their usual hour, and no one complained the next morning of not having slept, though under Michael's eyes there were ominous purple rings which told of his having enjoyed something less than perfect repose.

Roger got a few words alone with him before breakfast.

"Michael, I want to speak to you. After what has happened, I don't see how I can stay on at the factories. I don't fancy being mixed up with those two, when you are my friend."

Michael paused a moment. "I understand what you mean," said he. "*You* are loyal, Roger, at any rate. But there is no need for you to feel like that. It is entirely between him and me, and not another soul in the world, if you know what I mean. I know what you feel, and I believe I should feel the same in your place; but can you make a sacrifice for my sake?"

"I dare say I could, if I knew what it was."

"It is, just to remain where you are. I don't want any one to notice it for me. I can notice things for myself—such things as I wish noticing."

"Oh, that settles the matter, of course," said Roger. "I shall stay—unless they sack me."

At that moment a note was brought to Michael. He opened and read it very quickly, and then tossed it across to Roger.

"Read it," said he. "You must see me

through each stage of this, so that we need never have to mention it to each other again."

Roger read it. It was from Gilbert, and the paper on which it was written was stamped, "Thorsgarth, Bradstane-upon-Tees."

"There are two precious rascals together under the same roof," was Roger's unspoken comment before he began to read.

But his face changed as he perused the lines. The note was short, but strong in its very baldness and simplicity; as unlike Gilbert's ordinary soft politeness as the inflexible decisiveness of Michael in the same matter had been unlike his usual conduct.

Gilbert asked Michael for an interview. "Though you have treated me like a dog," he said, "I will show you things so that they shall be right, if you will see me. I can make it straight, too, though you do

not think so." After a few more phrases of a similar kind, he concluded—"Do not be hasty in your reply. Think well before you refuse what I ask, for if you do, I shall never ask again. I can make it right, and the whole future of both of us may depend upon your answer."

Roger read this twice over to himself, and looked at Michael, who had gone to his desk and was writing quickly. As soon as he had finished, he came again to Roger and handed him his letter, which ran—

"I have received your note, and decline to see you or hold any communications with you. Your possessions are, I believe, at the Red Gables. I shall not be there to-morrow, and you will be at liberty to fetch away what you choose of your belongings. After that you cannot be admitted there.

"MICHAEL LANGSTROTH."

“Michael,” said Roger, holding both these documents in his hand, and speaking very earnestly, “forgive me for even seeming to meddle with your affairs. Gilbert has a meaning under that note of his. Won’t you think twice before you send that answer to him?”

“I did all the thinking about him that I shall ever give to him again, yesterday,” said Michael trenchantly. “Do you suppose I spent all yesterday shut up in that room without coming to some definite conclusions upon matters in general and in particular? That is the answer I mean him to have, and that is the answer I shall send him.”

Roger had been far more struck than he would have cared to confess, with Gilbert’s appeal. He felt as if confessing it would impeach his loyalty to his friend, and he was all Michael’s—heart and soul. But he was a man with a reasonable head too, and he could not thrust out the feeling,

though he was angry with himself for having it, that Michael was unjust, even though the object of his injustice were so great a sinner as Gilbert. Yesterday, Roger had thought no punishment could be terrible enough for Gilbert and his "sneaking;" now the punishment was beginning, and he found himself almost ready to plead for mercy for the criminal.

"Michael," he said, in a low voice, "have you the right to do it?"

"Yes, I have," replied Michael, his face growing terribly hard and set again. "Nothing that I do to him now can be wrong."

Roger paused, looking at his friend. In his mind were the words, "until seventy times seven," but he had not the courage to utter them. In the abstract, and as a Christian precept and command, doubtless they were right, but Michael was his friend; Michael had been so fearfully, so stupendously wronged and cheated, and

by his own brother. Was he to plead Gilbert's cause to Michael? The idea seemed monstrous. Make it right? What could make right or alter that which he had done, cunningly and secretly, against the brother who had trusted him? "Put yourself in his place—in Michael's place," said Roger to himself. "Michael must be right. And yet—what a cursed thing to have reared its head between two brothers!"

"You will do what you—please" (he was going to have said, "what you think right," but he instinctively felt that that would not have been the true expression). "I know I would give my right hand if it could be different."

"I know you would, but it never can and never will," said Michael, folding and sealing his letter; and within a quarter of an hour it was on its way to Thorsgarth.

"Are you going far to-day?" the doctor asked Michael at breakfast. He would

have given a good deal if the young man would have professed himself unable to stir, and so would have given him an opening for sympathy and condolence. But the young man did nothing of the kind.

“Yes,” he answered at once; “a good way. I shall not be back to lunch. I shall get that at the Brydges’. Then I have to go on to Cotherstone, but I shall be back to dinner; and then,” he added, “I must really try to get to Balder Hall. It is ages since I was there.”

CHAPTER X.

THE PROCESS OF ANNEALING.

SOON after breakfast they separated as was their wont. Roger and the doctor came and went as usual, but the November afternoon had grown to darkness before Michael returned, looking pale and fagged from his long ride and hard day's work. Taken as a whole, the patients in and around Bradstane were not a very profitable set. For one rich old lady like Miss Strangforth, said Dr. Rowntree, lingering on as a chronic invalid for years—always wanting attention, and always profoundly grateful for all that her physicians either did or failed to do for her, and paying her bills with a cheque by return of post—for one

treasure like this there were a dozen farmers' wives and daughters, or sordid, unlovely poor in Bridge Street, calling upon the doctor with a frequency and persistency which they would never have dreamed of if they had possessed either the means or the intention of paying him. Others there were, cottagers, labourers, living at immense distances over bad roads, and expecting a great deal of attention in return for very small fees — anything but a profitable *clientèle*—and some of these Michael had been visiting to-day.

He came in, picked up a note which lay on the hall table waiting for him, which he looked for as if he expected it—his dark face lighted for a moment as he took it, for the handwriting was that of Magdalen Wynter—put his head in at the library door, remarking, "I'm wet through—change my things—down directly," and ran upstairs, shutting his bedroom door after him.

“What a spirit!” cried the doctor, enthusiastically. “What a spirit he has! He’ll get over it yet.”

“Better than his brother will, I think,” said Roger, half to himself; and then, gazing into the fire, he wondered what Gilbert was doing, and wished, as he had caught himself wishing more than once that day, that Michael could have seen his way to answer that note of Gilbert’s differently.

By-and-by the gong sounded. Roger and the doctor went into the dining-room. Michael was still upstairs. The soup had been served, and he came not.

“Go to Mr. Langstroth’s door and say everything will be cold, and we are waiting for him,” said Dr. Rowntree to the serving-maid, who did as she was told, and presently returned, speedily followed by Michael.

Roger gave a sharp glance at him, and thought he carried his head very high—higher than usual.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," he said with an affected, jaunty air, not in the least like his usual manner. "I quite forgot how time was going on."

He laughed as he spoke, and said he was ravenously hungry, but offended the doctor greatly by scarcely touching what was set before him.

"What do you mean by saying you are ravenous, and then not eating anything?" he asked crossly.

Michael laughed a nervous, forced laugh, and replied—

"Oh, I must have thought I was hungrier than I really am. I can't eat anything now. These long rides take it out of a fellow in such a way."

"Did you have lunch at the Brydges'?"

"Yes. They have quite a lot of people staying there. That was one reason why I was so late. After lunch I went with Tom to the stables to see his new hunter. It is a beauty, too."

Roger sat silent, misliking the unusual volubility of Michael's speech and excuses. Michael himself, in the mean time, had gone off on a new tack, and was describing his adventures at a farmhouse on the moors, and the extraordinary symptoms enumerated by the mistress of it as requiring his advice. Dr. Rowntree, pleased to see that Michael was what he called "plucking up a bit," did not notice anything forced or unnatural in his manner. Roger's forebodings grew every moment darker, and he was thankful when at last they rose from the table and went into the library. On their way thither, however, he happened to touch Michael's sleeve with his hand, and found that it was wet.

"Why, man!" exclaimed he, "you said you were wet through, and you have got on the identical togs that you came in with. What an ass you are, Michael!" he added gently. "Go upstairs and change, right away, or you won't get to Balder Hall to-night."

"I'm not going to Balder Hall—I think not," said Michael wearily, as he let Roger push him towards the stairs, up which he began slowly and aimlessly to climb.

"There's something wrong—something wrong—something wrong," kept ringing through Roger's mind. "And something more than I know of."

Michael's room was over the study. Roger, listening intently, heard him go into it, move about for a moment, and then all was quiet. He sat with a book in his hand, and waited till his suspense grew almost to agony. At last he could be quiet no longer. He went upstairs and knocked softly at Michael's door. There was no answer. When he had tried once or twice again, he opened the door and went in. The candle burned on the dressing-table. Michael was in a large old easy-chair by the bedside, his head sunk on his breast, his eyes closed, and an open letter drooping from his right hand.

“Still in those wet clothes,” muttered Roger. “He’ll kill himself.”

He went up to him, and touched him on the shoulder. Michael awoke with a start, and looked confusedly around him.

“Roger!” he said. “I’m so sleepy. I don’t know what’s come over me.” He seemed to see the letter he held, and went on, in an absent way, “Wasn’t it rather too bad of her not to wait till she had seen me? So long—it’s three years since I began to wait for her and work for her. But as soon as she heard the first whisper—well, I did write and tell her what I’d done, and said I would go up and see her to-night, you know—yes, to-night. But she never waited. She flung me off,” and he threw out his arms. “She made haste to do it. She must have been glad to do it! There’s something in her letter which says so. See!” He held it out to Roger. “What a lot of disagreeable things you’ve had to do for me lately!” he

went on. "Good Lord! how tired I am! I never was so tired in my life. I can't imagine the reason of it."

Roger, deferring for a moment his intention of making Michael go to bed, stopped to read the letter, which ran:—

"MY DEAR MICHAEL,

"I received your letter this morning, and I am sorry to say I cannot approve of what you have done. Even before I got it, I had been thinking for some time about our engagement, and wondering if it had ever been a wise one. During these three days that you have not been here, I have had ample time to consider the subject. Even if nothing further had happened, I should have written as I now do; but I do not disguise from you that the manner in which you have yourself cut off every prospect of advancement strengthens my resolution. These things are best done promptly. It saves pain to all concerned.

“As there is now evidently no prospect of our being married within any definite time, I wish our engagement to cease. I desire this both on your account and my own. In addition to the reasons already stated, I do not think it would be for your happiness to continue it, and I am quite sure it would not be for mine. I shall be glad of a line from you when convenient, to say that you consent to my proposal; and with every wish for your happiness and prosperity,

“I remain,

“Your sincere friend,

“MAGDALEN WYNTER.”

“There’s a specimen of elegant composition!” exclaimed Michael, suddenly sitting upright, and laughing harshly. “It could not have been more proper if she had written it at school, and the head governess had corrected it. What a blessed thing it is when people know their own minds, and can command plain

English in which to make them known! Only it's a pity that they should take three years to learn what they do want, or whom they don't want." He gave a disagreeable little laugh at his own pleasantry, and then rose. "If you'll go down, Roger, I will now change these things, and join you directly. But it's lucky I need not go to Balder Hall, for I feel more and more tired every minute."

"Take off your things, by all means," said Roger gravely; "but you must not come down. You must go to bed."

"To bed!" exclaimed Michael contemptuously. "A man go to bed because he's had a long ride in the wet and cold, and finds rather a chilly letter to greet him on his return! I am not such an ass."

But as he spoke, strength seemed to forsake his limbs; he could not stand any more, but sat down again in the chair by the bedside.

"Perhaps Askam is sitting with her

now. I suppose they will be married," he said, betraying in his sudden weakness what his secret fear had evidently been. "Perhaps she will keep him straight. He needs it, and she has a spirit, though I know Gilbert and my father never thought so ; and——"

Here he began to wander in his talk ; was shivering and shaking with cold one moment, burning hot the next. The thorough drenching which he had got after leaving the Brydges' and riding for miles in the teeth of the bitter wind and rain ; the excited condition of his brain over Gilbert's treachery ; the reception of Magdalen's letter, with its icy, unyielding egoism, showing him that all these years her own advantage was what she had been thinking of, and that there was not a spark of love for him in her dull heart ;—these things broke through even his magnificent health and strength. He could not shake off the physical chill

any more than he could the mental prostration. An attack of a tedious, wearing low fever reduced him to perfect physical weakness and docility ; but far worse than the fever was the accompanying mental gloom, the result of the shock to the nervous system. The young man, shut up in his room, too weak in body to move and shake off his demon visitant, went through all the horrors of a complete nervous break-down, and made intimate acquaintance with all its attendant crew of ghastly shades—those pallid ghosts which assemble and gibber and mouth at us when we have so imposed upon those hard-worked servants, nerves and brain, as to have rendered them for the time powerless to answer to our imperious demands. Exhausted, they sink down, and say to us, “ We can no more,” and then we are at the mercy of every shadow, every whisper, every vain imagining and thought of horror.

Michael Langstroth, with his superb constitution and youth and temperance to back him, and with the devoted nursing of two such friends as Roger and the doctor, was in the course of a few weeks restored to comparative strength. Gradually the shade and ghosts, the bats and owls that haunt the dark places of the human mind, retired before gathering physical strength. Things were gone that could never be restored—hopes, joys, faiths, enthusiasms; things which had once seemed all-important, appeared now almost too insignificant for notice. Under Roger's eyes was the process accomplished which in his blindness he had long ago wished for his friend. He was made into a man: going into the valley of the shadow a youth, for all his six and twenty years, his bone, and his muscle, and his brain; coming out of it alive, sane, whole, if weak, but stripped of every superfluous hope, confidence, or youthfulness.

It was November when he went, to his room that night ; it was the very end of December when he came out of it, a hollow-eyed spectre enough. And it was a month later still when Dr. Rowntree carried him down to Hastings one day, returning himself the next, and leaving his adopted son there to recruit.

So ended Michael Langstroth's youth, as a tale that is told.

CHAPTER XI.

OTHO'S LETTER-BAG.

A NOVEMBER morning, five years later. The sky gray and brooding, the trees still and leafless. Everything outside betokened the drear season of the year, and even the trimly kept lawns of Thorsgarth could not give brightness to this mood of Nature and the time o' day.

Within, in a small room which he generally used for breakfasting, Otho Askam stood on the hearthrug, with his burly back turned towards a large fire. A letter was in his hand, to which he seemed to pay more attention than it was usually his habit to give to his corre-

spondence, for he turned it about, and perused it often. What are the changes which five years may have wrought in his traits, or how many of them have become strengthened and accentuated during that time ?

He would seem, outwardly considered, to have gained something, both in breadth and solidity, without having in any way weakened or deteriorated. The lines were as sturdy, as burly as before. The expression of his countenance was distinctly imperious, even more imperious than of yore. As he stood there, the letter in one hand, the other impatiently smoothing the hair on his upper lip—a dark line only, which seemed to accentuate the sullenness of his face, without hiding or softening a single harsh trait or feature—as he stood there his countenance was a dangerous-looking one ; the expression or atmosphere which radiated from the man was not that of sincerity. In repose he

had the old fierceness of expression—whatever mental or moral change might have taken place, that old look remained ; and when he raised his dark eyes and lifted his head, there was the same breathless, hunted, or hunting look about him, as in the days of his very young manhood there had been.

He was alone, and had just finished breakfast. At his feet sat a dignified Skye terrier, somewhat advanced in years, and with the self-conscious aspect of a dog which has long been made much of by human beings, so that at last it has come to feel convinced that all their actions, words, and movements have some reference to it and its doings. It gazed up into Otho's face and watched his gestures, and when he spoke to it, it seemed pleased. Animals, even if they have that keen discernment as to the virtue or vice of the beings by whom they are surrounded, with which some persons

credit them, can conceal their likes and dislikes, for their own purposes, quite as cleverly as the men and women they live with—at least, sophisticated and humanized dogs, like this highly educated Pounser, can.

Looking out of the window, one saw the drear season of the year plainly written upon the outward aspect of things. November, sad November, but the November of the country, and not of the town. In southern places, and more favoured spots, trees might still be covered with fiery autumn tints; but here every leaf had dropped, and upon the black and sodden-looking boughs and twigs hung a damp, clammy dew, and the grass was hoar and gray with the same. The sky was leaden; not a branch stirred. From here one could see where the ground sloped towards the river, but one could not see the stream itself. The room was warm; the house was quiet;

the master was vexed—so much was plainly to be read on his face. And so much was audible from his lips too, as he ejaculated in a wrathful tone—

“Beastly folly—and a beastly nuisance, too!”

And the cause of his vexation, the letter he held in his hand. It is easy to read over his shoulder, and follow the lines, as he peruses it a third time, with the result, apparently, of increasing his first exasperation.

“Brinswell, L——

“DEAR OTHO,

“It is a very long time since you wrote to me,—longer than usual. As for your ever coming to see me, I have long ago given up that expectation as a wild delusion. Are you ‘busy’? Country gentlemen usually are, from what I hear; and from what I’ve seen I should say they work very hard to make believe they

have more to do than they know how to manage.

“I wonder if you have realized that I was twenty-two on my last birthday? I don’t suppose you have ever given a thought to the subject. At least, I missed your usual kind remembrance of me, on the occasion.” [“What the dickens does she mean? I’ve never been in the habit of sending her birthday presents!”]

“Well, it is of no use wasting words over things. I wish to explain my situation and intentions to you. Since Aunt Emily’s death, six months ago, Uncle Robert has been quite broken up, and he doesn’t seem to get any better. It is a fearful loss to him. No one knew—of the world at large, I mean—how much they were bound up in each other, and how fearfully he misses her. After trying everything in the way of staying at home and keeping quiet, the doctors have advised a long voyage and a complete

change. It has been decided to close Brinswell for a year at least, and he and Paul will set out on their travels in a week or two. I think they will visit Australia first, as they seem to think the long voyage will do him good, and they talk about India and America before they return—medicine for a troubled mind. Poor Uncle Robert! He agrees to all, and says he knows he is morbid. It seems to be thought very morbid nowadays if you have a grief that's past the healing for six months, even though it be your dearest in the whole world that has gone from you.

“ I am not going with Uncle Robert and Paul. If it had been a shorter journey, I might have done so. I should have liked immensely to go to America, for instance. But this is different. Paul, of course, goes with him, because it would be outrageous to think of his going alone; but the doctor, and Paul too, say he should not be sur-

rounded by too many of his own family, as the object is entire change. They both think it better for me not to go; and I shall do as they think fit. It is very sad every way.

“Very sad, it is—so sad that I feel myself a little heartless, because I can’t help being rather glad that I shall leave here, and at last make acquaintance with my own home and my own brother. You do not know how often I have wished to do so. I am glad I shall see my birth-place and my north-country home; very glad I shall see you. And will not you say you will be glad to see me, dear Otho? It is years since I have seen you, and it seems unnatural that it should be so. Will you come down and fetch me, or are you too busy? I propose to leave here a week from to-day. Let me know about it.

“There is one other thing that I feel I must mention to you, which makes me

very glad to be leaving here. About six months ago, Mr. Mowbray—you know, he is the rector of the next parish ; the Hon. and Rev. Percy Mowbray—proposed to me. Poor Aunt Emily was very anxious for me to marry him, but it was a sheer, utter impossibility. Poor Aunt E—— ! Mr. Mowbray is rich, I believe, and of very good family, but I have never liked him, and I could not think of it for a moment. It was very painful to me to find how annoyed she was with me, even to the last. And of course Mr. Mowbray ceased to visit here, though I had to meet him sometimes. Altogether, it will be a great relief to me in every way, to get to Bradstane for a time. Now you are acquainted with all my reasons for wishing to come to you, and with my plans too, for the present. Send me a line soon, and believe me,

“ Your affectionate Sister,

“ ELEANOR ASKAM.”

Otho flung the letter upon the table with temper.

“Why the d—l could not she marry the fellow?” he muttered angrily, looking darkly at Pounser, who slightly moved his tail and elevated his ears with a sigh, as if he too wondered why—why she could not have married the fellow.

“What could she wish for more? A girl in her position ought to take the first opportunity that offers—good, of course—of settling herself in life. And I’m sure old Aunt Emily knew what she was about. No one keener on family and money in the world. If she wanted the match so badly, I’ll go bail it was a good one. Of course she must marry—girls like her always must marry—and of course she can’t go and marry a nobody. What a fool she must be! One would think she was not all there. Not that I should think the parson and I should have hit it off very well as brothers-in-law.” He

gave a short little laugh. "A thundering mistake, that will," he went on within himself. "Such wills have no business to be made."

This reflection referred to a clause in his father's will, providing that Otho's sister, so long as he and she both remained unmarried, was entitled to a home at Thorsgarth whenever she chose to inhabit it. In the event of his marriage, there remained for her the Dower House, which indeed was hers for her life if she remained unmarried—an old stone house in the square, not far from the Red Gables.'

"I can't stop it, I suppose. It is a beastly nuisance, if ever there was one. As for going to fetch her, I shall do no such thing. Go nearly three hundred miles to fetch back some one I don't want? Not I! . . . And what can I do with her when I get her here? Good Lord! why must women be so stupid?

Such sentimental nonsense! Because I am her brother—bah! There's that whey-faced Paul Stanley, her cousin, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth—she's known him all her life, and he has been far more of a brother to her than I have."

Otho felt vindictive, realizing what a grievous thing it was that he should have to be anybody's brother.

"The goings on in this house won't suit her at all," he reflected, getting more and more savage the longer he thought about it. "It has been a bachelor's house all these years, and it has come to something if I'm to turn everything topsy-turvy for a chit of a girl like that. Dogs and horses and men, and tobacco and wine and cards—what will she do amidst it all? And what shall I do with her?"

He stopped muttering from sheer blankness of mind on the subject, still fiercely stroking his upper lip, till after a time a look of relief, though of very ill-tempered

relief at the best, came over his face, as he thought—

“ I suppose I must go and tell Magdalen about it. She'll be able to suggest something. I'll go this morning, before I answer this confounded letter. Whew—w—w ! ”

He blew out a kind of ill-tempered sigh, and Pounser wagged his tail in visible and exceeding satisfaction.

Then Otho picked up another letter—short and, as it would seem, sweet, to him at least, for his countenance relaxed visibly.

“ That's well. It will be rather a relief to have him here if she comes. He knows what is the right thing to do when there are petticoats on the premises. I don't.”

Then he rang the bell, ordered the breakfast-things to be taken away, and said he wanted his horse at eleven.

* * * * *

Soon after twelve Otho rode up to Balder Hall, was admitted to Miss Wyn

ter's boudoir, and proceeded to unfold his troubles to her.

She had received him with the tranquillity which had always been the chief characteristic of her demeanour, and which seemed neither to have increased nor diminished with years ; heard all that he had to say ; and finally, when he pulled Eleanor's letter out of his pocket, and said, "See for yourself what she says," Magdalen took the letter, opened it deliberately, and as deliberately read it. She had never heard much about Otho's sister ; she was not a woman to talk to men about their feminine relatives, and Otho had always been glad to ignore his sister's existence as much as possible. This suddenly announced coming of Miss Askam took Magdalen by surprise. She had no time to decide whether it would best suit her views that they should be friends or enemies, but the letter would possibly give her a valuable glimpse into the writer's

mind, perhaps even into her character, written as it was confidentially to an only brother. As to the question whether it was honourable or not to read such a letter, Miss Wynter was exactly the woman to say, if any one had raised such a scruple, "Why, Otho gave it me!" Go to! she might have been credited with saying—the keeping one's own integrity is enough work for any person, without telling others when they appear to be losing theirs.

"Ah," said she, when she had finished the letter, "it is quite obvious why she wants to come. I did not know your sister was twenty-two, Otho. Indeed, I hardly realized that you had a sister."

"No more did I, till she went and did this," said Otho resentfully.

"And you would rather she did not come?"

"Much rather. But it's no use thinking of keeping her away. I'm not going to

try. She has got the right to come, by my father's will, and to stay as long as she likes, till one of us gets married. I can't prevent it. The thing is, I don't know what to do with her when I get her here."

"Well, if you make it very pleasant for her, of course she'll want to stay."

Otho nodded. "Of course."

"And if you upset all your habits, and make great changes on her account, then she will think you want her to stay, which would be quite a false impression."

"I never thought of that."

"Of course not; only it seems such a very obvious thing. Perhaps that is why it never occurred to you."

"Now come, none of your chaff. What I thought of was, that it's simply impossible for a girl like that to settle down in a house full of my ways. I must do something, and what to do I don't know. I wanted your advice."

"And pray what right have you to my

advice? Why should I interfere between you and your sister? I might tell you it is a just retribution on you for having alienated yourself systematically from all such ties. You demand my advice as if you were a highwayman requiring my watch and purse."

Otho fidgeted and fumbled, h'mmed and ha'd.

"I beg your pardon, Magdalen. I thought I had the right—of having asked before, and received advice, you know. And you know I always do come to you when I am in trouble."

"Oh yes; I know you do."

"Would you please tell me what I had better do?"

"Is she good-looking?" asked Magdalen.

"Oh no!" said Otho, promptly. "She has red hair and freckles."

Magdalen glanced at Otho's own dark traits, and said, "Now, Otho!"

"Upon my soul and honour she has;

and one of those faces that flush up all over, without a minute's warning. I never could see the sense of those faces. She goes into raptures, you know, and cries and laughs about things—at least, she did when I saw her. In fact, though she's been at college somewhere, and is a complete blue—reads Homer, and all such bosh—I thought her a regular baby. She's got rather a dashing figure," he added musingly, "but I swear to you, Magdalen, she is *not* good-looking."

"But why, then, does this clergyman want to marry her? A man of wealth, family, and position? I know quite well who he is. They are very first-rate people down there."

"Bah! She has twelve hundred a year of her own, to do what she likes with. Whoever heard of a parson, rich or poor, that could rise above such a thing as that?" said Otho, with brutality. "And then, all places are not like Bradstane.

They may like blues and freckles down there . . . As for his being a man of wealth, family, and position, you might say that of me;" and he laughed cynically. "She's as good as he is, any day."

"Yes," said Magdalen gently. "She is your sister." She took up her work. "It seems to me that you are making a great fuss about nothing. Why make any difference at all for her? Thorsgarth is your house, not hers, though she has the right to live there, under present circumstances. It is large enough in all conscience. Half a dozen families might live there, and hardly ever meet in the passages. Give her a sitting-room for herself, and tell her you are sorry that your business doesn't leave you time to see very much of her. It will not be long before she finds out what a dull place Bradstane is, and I do not think she will care to remain in it very long, especially with such a sympathetic brother."

"You are a gem!" he said admiringly.

"And bring her up to see me as soon as you can, after she comes."

"The next afternoon, if it's fine," he said eagerly.

"Yes, the next afternoon, if you like. It will make no difference to me."

Then, as if she had had enough of the subject, she returned the letter to him, and asked, "Is there no meet to-day?"

"No. We got word last night that there wouldn't be. I'm going down to Bradstane just now, to the works. By the way, I had a letter from Gilbert, too, this morning. He's coming down for Christmas, as usual."

"Oh, he never fails you."

"No; he never does. I must take care not to bring him up here while his brother is on the premises. When does he come, now?"

"I know nothing about it. Sometimes at one hour, sometimes at another. And

the surest way to bring about a collision is to take so much care to avoid one. As if there were not room for Gilbert and him in the house without dodging in that stupid way !”

“ That’s all very fine, but accidents will happen. Suppose they were to meet, after all, and have a shindy.”

“ A shindy ! Really, Otho, you exasperate me. In the first place, though you might, and probably would, make a shindy under such circumstances, you ought to know that they would never make one under any circumstances. And if they wished to, ever so, would they dare, before me ?”

“ Whew—w !” murmured Otho, under his breath ; and then aloud—

“ It seems as if all I said offended you this morning, Magdalen. However, I’ll be more good-natured than you, and say thank you for your advice, which I shall follow. I must be off now.”

He got up and stood before her, holding out his hand. Magdalen surveyed him in the same cold, direct manner, as before. It was her old calm, almost expressionless gaze, but the eyes which had once been soft and velvety were now hard. She said good morning to him in a very indifferent way, and rang the bell. Otho left the room and went downstairs.

His inventive genius was apparently not great. He carried out her advice or instructions, whichever it might have been, almost to the letter. Without waiting to go to the works, he first of all called in at Thorsgarth, and while his horse waited, sat down and wrote a short letter to his sister, saying that he would meet her at the station if she would let him know by what train to expect her; that he was sorry to say he was quite too much engaged to travel down to the New Forest to bring her to Thorsgarth. He was afraid she would find Bradstane insufferably dull

after the social life to which she had been accustomed. With regard to the parson, he added, with characteristic want of finish in his style, he thought it a pity that she had not seen her way to taking him, as the match seemed in every way a good one, but he could hear all about that when they met, and so he was her affectionate Brother, OTHO ASKAM.

Then he rang the bell and desired to see the housekeeper; and when she arrived upon the scene, he gave his orders with the brevity and authority of a great general, and of course Mrs. Sparkes could not know that the said orders had originated with Magdalen Wynter. It was decided that some south rooms—"the late Mrs. Askam's suite," said Mrs. Sparkes—were to be prepared for Eleanor.

"Yes," said Otho, with an uneasy feeling that, since he proposed to leave his sister considerably to her own society, it behoved him to look to her personal com-

fort as much as possible. "And see that they are made nice—aired, you know, and to look—a—bright, and all that."

"Oh, sir, the rooms will not need much doing to them. It's not my system to be taken by surprise," said Mrs. Sparkes, with a lofty smile.

"Isn't it?" said Otho, with a kind of brusque facetiousness which had its effect in making him popular with some of his dependents. "I wish I knew how you managed to avoid it. This affair—Miss Askam's coming, has taken me very much by surprise."

"Oh, I didn't mean that exactly, sir," said Mrs. Sparkes, pleased at the confidence reposed in her. "There's some things can't be provided for, but *I* meant things in general."

"Ah! well, you'll remember what I said," remarked Otho; and Mrs. Sparkes bowed herself out.

Then he called for his horse again, and

set off for his long-delayed visit to the Townend Mills. It need hardly be said that these calls were wholly perfunctory. Gilbert, from his London office, gave the orders, and Roger Camm in his Bradstane one carried them out. Otho had a pleasure in calling and looking round now and then, because he knew how Michael and Sir Thomas Winthrop hated the Bradstane Jute Co., Limited, and that Roger Camm hated him, Otho, the man who had found the money for it. The conclusion to which he had come by the time that he halted in the mill-yard was that, having settled all things, he had now just one week of liberty before him, and, putting his sister from his mind, he resolved to think no more about her until her arrival should force him to do so.

CHAPTER XII

ELEANOR.

OTHO's week of freedom was over. His sister had come, and on the day following her arrival, in the afternoon, she rode with him through Bradstane town towards Balder Hall.

Any one who could have seen her, even in the gray and mournful November light, would have seen a very beautiful young woman. She was tall, and had an admirable figure, full of grace and strength. No feeble development here, nor niggard traits, nor look of feeble spine or over-sensitive nerves. Whatever the intellect within that beautiful head, its outward case

was not one to find fault with. Her features were not very regular ; harmonious, though, in their very irregularity. A soft, ivory-white complexion, as healthy as many a ruddy one ; and with this complexion, the red-brown hair and lambent, tawny eyes which sometimes accompany it. Her eyebrows were much darker than either her hair or her eyes ; and she had a large mouth, but a beautiful one—beautiful because of its smile in mirth and of its expression in repose.

There was a vague, indefinite family likeness between her and the fierce-looking Otho. Where it lay, in what exactly it consisted, it would have been impossible to say, but it was there, though it was slight, and perhaps more easily to be detected when they were apart than when they were together ; that is, seeing one of them alone, an observer might have thought, “How like her brother” or “his sister !” And yet, had the other one

appeared, and the faces been compared, none could have discerned any resemblance.

During the first part of their ride they were both somewhat silent. She was looking about her with quick, keen glances, speaking an observant eye. Otho was wondering what Magdalen would say to him, what he could say to her, at a later time, when he, after his offhand description of the other day, had to introduce to her this beautiful creature now riding with him.

Eleanor, while making her observations on the town and the surroundings, was also occupied in thinking things over. It was a fact, she told herself with some mortification, that Otho and she were strangers to each other. It seemed that absence, and long separation, and the influence of utterly diverse lives and habits did produce that strangeness, even between brother and sister. Her Aunt Emily, in some of their talks, had told her that this would be the case, and she had said laugh-

ingly that she would defy her brother to be a stranger to her, or to make a stranger of her. She had felt very strong; she felt very strong now. That was her chief feeling, when she thought about herself at all—strength of soul and body, and a happy confidence that truth is great and will prevail.

Yet this had not been such a joyful home-coming as it ought to have been. In all confidence she had set out to find the home which she had only twice visited, each time for a day or two, on some tour with her guardians, since, at six years of age, she had been brought away by her Aunt Emily, a motherless and fatherless child. Those visits had both been paid while she was still under fourteen, before Otho had left college and taken possession. Otho was six years her senior, and had pursued his public school course and got through his college career while she was yet in the schoolroom and in short frocks.

Occasionally, when he had been in town, or anywhere near them, he had paid her a flying visit; had once, when they had been in the Highlands, spent a few days with them, to shoot grouse with his uncle and cousin Paul. On these occasions he had told her that she grew a fine girl (fancying it was a nice kind of thing to say to a sister, though when he said "fine" he meant "tall," and had taken so little real notice of her, that he had spoken in all good faith when describing her to Magdalen the week before). And he had uniformly discouraged the idea of her coming to live at Thorsgarth (it had never been seriously broached before), saying, whenever allusion had been made to such a thing, "Oh, you will never want a home there. You will be married before that."

But Eleanor had not married, and she had come to Thorsgarth to make her home there.

"Is this all the town there is, Otho?"

she asked suddenly, as they emerged from the street into the open road. "I've almost forgotten it. What an odd little, gray, weather-beaten place it is! Not a bit like the south."

"Of course not."

"I feel as if I'd never been here, and I hardly ever meet any one who has. It looks bleak here; that's what I mean."

"Well, it is," said Otho, vexed with such a persistent talk about the looks of a place. As if it mattered what Bradstane looked like! "And it's November, too. You can't expect roses in November."

"But I've always had them. There were Dijon roses growing over the south walls at Brinswell when I left. You remember Brinswell, Otho?"

"Yes, I do; and a dull hole it was."

"Not any duller than Thorsgarth, I should fancy. It was as lovely a place as ever I saw. We were more there and less in London the last few years. Of

course I like London, but I never felt dull at Brinswell. What fruit and flowers! Of course, things can't grow here as they did there. The trees look so small and stunted."

"Small! Why, the Bradstane ash trees are noted all through the country-side."

"Well, yes, the ash trees. They are fine. But, of course, they ought to be." And she hummed to herself—

"Oh, the oak, and the ash, and the bonny ivy tree,
They grow the best at home in the north countrie."

"At home," she added, half to herself. "This is the north countrie, and this is my home, after all. It's a shame I don't know it better. Wherever you look," she added, addressing him directly again, "you seem to see a blue wall in the distance. Otho, does any one ever get as far as those blue walls?" And she pointed towards the north-west, where Mickle Fell and his brethren loomed high.

"Blue walls!" repeated Otho, embar-

rassed by the application of such terms to the moors, which to him represented so many acres of good shooting, and those in another direction stabling for another hobby of his, of which Eleanor was as yet unaware. "How you talk! Those that you are pointing to are the fells on the Westmoreland border, and those other ones, to the south, are the Swaledale moors."

"Swaledale moors? But one can get over them, I suppose. What is there on the other side?"

"More moors and more dales. It's bleak enough there, if you like. There's some good shooting, though."

"I should like to see what there is at the other side," said Eleanor, her eyes fixed dreamily on the moors. Then, as they turned a bend in the road, "Is it far to this place you are taking me to?"

"Only about another three-quarters of a mile."

“This Miss Wynter—is she a very old friend of yours?” asked Eleanor unconsciously. “I don’t ever remember to have heard you speak of her.”

“Oh yes, you have,” said Otho, with effrontery; “but you’ve very likely forgotten. She is my only friend—amongst the women, that is.”

“Ah! an elderly woman?”

“About my own—well, she’s a year or so older than I am.”

“Oh! An invalid, I suppose?”

“Why the—— What on earth makes you think she should be an invalid?”

“If she is neither old nor ill, I can’t understand why I am being taken to see her. What should prevent her from coming to call upon me, in the usual order of things?”

Otho was embarrassed, and annoyed too. This extremely simple question of Eleanor’s showed him, in a sudden flash, that Magdalen’s behaviour was not exactly

courteous. Stealing a side-glance at his sister, he realized that when she came to meet Magdalen, she might consider the latter had been insolent in her pretensions. Eleanor, to use his own phrase, knew what was what, every bit as well as Magdalen did. Free and natural though her manner was, he had known enough of his Aunt Emily to be aware that no one brought up by her could remain in ignorance as to any social usages. In his haste to bring Magdalen's influence into the field, he had made a mistake, and she probably did not care whether Eleanor were offended or no. All he could say to get himself out of his difficulty was—

“We're a neighbourly lot here, when we do happen to be friends. You'll be disappointed if you expect to find London etiquette at Bradstane.”

“I dare say,” said she, with a light laugh. “I've generally found country etiquette far more burdensome than etiquette in

London. That was partly what made me wonder. However, people do get a little rusty in their manners, I dare say, when they live in one small set," Eleanor concluded serenely; but there was a sparkle in her eye as she spoke. Her curiosity as to this Miss Wynter was aroused.

Otho burst into a short laugh, as he heard this speech, thinking within himself, "I'll keep that for Magdalen, and treat her to it when she's pulling me up, some day. Upon my word, this girl is enough to make most others look rusty."

"Miss Wynter is your only friend among the women, you say," pursued Eleanor in flute-like tones. "How is that? Don't you like the ladies about here?"

Otho's expression of countenance, on hearing this question, was worthy of study. Eleanor saw it, and averted her face. She had already accurately gauged one phase of Otho's character. He was in-

wardly perturbed just now. His troubles were beginning already. Here was this girl evidently under the impression that he was hand-in-glove with all the ordinary society of the place. How was he to explain to her exactly how things stood between him and Magdalen Wynter? He knew he could not, in any way that should seem plausible to one brought up like her. He was bored at having to explain at all, and in his vexation took refuge in some sweeping general statements.

“Like the ladies about here? No, I don’t. And that is one reason why I knew you would be awfully dull if you came here. You see, it has suited my tastes not to go much into the society here—in fact, hardly at all; and they have just begun to understand it at last, and to let me alone—give over inviting me, and all that. So you won’t find it very lively. But Magdalen is different. I’ve

known her ever since I came here. We were thick at the very first, and have stuck together ever since, because she's so reasonable and sensible. As for the others"—he spoke with solemnity—"they are one half sharks and the other half fools. There's no such thing as meeting a girl, and trying to have a friendship with her, before you go any further. Your sex, my dear, are incapable of friendship with a man. Either they try to make him in love with them, and make his existence miserable, or they fall in love with him themselves—or think they do; it's much of a muchness—and if he don't respond they say he has deceived them, or trifled with them, or something equally absurd. Suppose you see a nice girl, or a girl that you think looks nice. Well, you have a head on your shoulders, and you know she may be a shrew, for all her pleasantness, just as a horse may be a screw, though he

looks all right. You think it worth while to try and know her a bit better, before you risk anything. You can't do it. You may not do it. It is their one object to get you to marry them without giving you any opportunity to know anything about them. You never get to know their real thoughts about any one thing on earth. You must run the gauntlet of their mothers and sisters to get even a word with them. It isn't fair; it's deuced hard. Why are you to show up everything, and be slanged if you don't do it all on the square, while they are not to have any questions asked at all? The sisters are bad enough, especially if you are sweet on a younger one, but the mothers—oh, Lord! Those mothers! If you do but look at one of their precious girls, they are down upon you to know your 'intentions.' I say, a man has a right to ask questions in his turn—if their tempers are all right, if they're sound in

wind and limb, and so on. I bolt if I see one of those mothers within——”

He was interrupted by a peal of laughter. Eleanor had contained herself as long as she could, but at each higher flight of Otho's sombre eloquence it had been more and more difficult to keep her gravity. Now it was impossible. She gave free vent to her mirth, and bent to her saddle-bow in her merriment.

“Oh, Otho!” she ejaculated at last, turning a face quivering with laughter to him, and eyes dancing behind tears of amusement. He looked at her in speechless astonishment, and then by degrees managed to take in the fact that she was laughing at him—at his solemn and withering denunciation of the man-traps set for the unwary in social life. He did not remember such a thing to have happened to him before, and he was stunned by the shock.

“Poor dear Otho!” she said, between

new bursts of merriment. "What a life you must have led, with all these women trying to entrap you! No wonder you are reserved and sad! No wonder you have retired into private life to avoid the dangers that beset you on all sides! I wonder almost that you dare ride out alone. And yet, Otho, what a great thing to be so sought after!"

Otho's face was almost purple, partly with breathless amazement, partly with anger. Eleanor, it seemed, did not realize, or did not care, to what inconvenience he was put by her presence here at all. She chaffed and laughed at him. She now put the crowning point to this offensive conduct by leaning over towards him, and asking, with a pretence of looking round to see that no one was near to look or listen—

"Otho, did Miss Wynter warn you of the danger of these harpies by whom you are surrounded? Women are always

quick to see through the designs of other women. How good of her to take care of you and keep you out of danger ! ”

Otho's deep colour grew deeper still. Shrewdly had Eleanor hit the mark. The language, the terms of expression, were his own, native to his genius and redolent of his mind ; but the substance of his speech was the substance of scores of conversations with Magdalen, in which she had amused him by tearing to pieces the supposed designs of their neighbours of the whole country-side.

“ What bosh ! ” he said at last, with sovereign contempt. “ You'll be saying next that she had designs herself.” A peculiar smile hovered about his sister's lips, but she said nothing. “ No, no. It is quite different with her, as you will see when you meet her. You can go and have an hour's chat with her—or two hours, if you like. She's always pleasant, always amusing ; no father or mother to

be down on you. And she does not imagine, even if you were to go and see her regularly twice a week, that you've got 'intentions;' and, what is more, she has none herself. She can be pleasant, and free, and agreeable, without all the time being bent upon hooking you. Yes"—the taciturn Otho waxed enthusiastic—"she is my friend. I don't care who knows it. She's the only woman in the neighbourhood that I call upon."

Had Eleanor been better acquainted with "the neighbourhood" and its annals, she might better have appreciated the honourable distinction conveyed in this speech.

"Dear me! She ought to be flattered, I am sure. Is this place of hers a large one?"

"Balder Hall, Magdalen's? God bless you, no! I wish it was. She's a poor penniless niece of an old bedridden woman, Miss Martha Strangforth, whom they call

about here 'the Immortal,' for they say she will never die. I dare say Magdalen wishes it were true, for so long as the old woman lives the girl has a home and a position. And old Martha's income dies with her, and I don't fancy she has saved much."

"Girl—she must be a precocious girl," said Eleanor sweetly.

"Oh, the malice of you women!" said Otho, gnashing his teeth with virtuous and masculine indignation. "When I say 'girl,' I'm rather stretching a point. She is a year or so older than I am—about eight and twenty. And it seems to me that precious few women under that age are worth speaking to."

"Well, they certainly should be worth speaking to by the time they are that age, if ever they intend to be. But if she is poor and dependent, it seems to me men ought to be rather careful about going to see her very often."

“For fear she should set traps for them, of course,” sneered Otho.

“Oh, not at all. But because other people are sometimes ill-natured, and a woman who has her way to make, or who may have her living to earn some time, cannot be too careful.”

“Oh, come, Eleanor! When you see her you will understand that one can’t speak of Magdalen Wynter in that way. No one could imagine her in any inferior position. It isn’t in her to take one.”

“Isn’t it? Well, it is lucky for her if she has some power that can defy need and want of money. I used to help Aunt Emily with some charitable works that she was interested in—governesses’ homes, and ladies’ work societies, and so on; and you would have been astonished at the terrible cases one used to see, and the deplorable condition of ladies—ladies of birth and beauty, with the most terrible tales of the straits to which poverty and distress

had driven them. I used to lie awake for hours sometimes, wishing I had the courage to divide my money into a common fund, for some of the poorest, and go and live with them on equal terms."

"You'll come to no good if you let that sort of nonsense get into your head," said Otho gruffly. "But it's useless to talk. You will understand what I mean when you see her," he added, feeling that his sister was not altogether devoid of the obstinacy which was so salient a feature in his own character. "She does not care for the people about here, you know. In fact, she dislikes them, and makes great fun of them. And they don't care about her ; she's too handsome for them."

Eleanor made no answer to this, and they rode on in silence for a little time. Miss Askam did not feel "drawn" to Magdalen by Otho's description of his friend. Indeed, it had the very natural effect of putting her mind into a defensive

attitude with regard to the other woman. Without being any stickler for forms, she could not understand why Miss Wynter had not called upon her, perhaps on her aunt's behalf, or why she was being thus hurried to see this wonderful penniless orphan who had no designs upon men, but who disliked and was disliked by all the other women of the neighbourhood. "It looks very much as if I were being taken to her on approval, for inspection," said Eleanor within herself. Her white teeth showed a little in a not altogether amiable smile. "Well, let it be so. I am committed to nothing with her. We will see what she is. I think I can sustain her inspection."

She also reflected that Otho's gift of character-drawing seemed to be in a very undeveloped condition, and she had more than once noticed, during her short career, that when men describe women, they very often paint them, not as they are, but as

the women have chosen that they should find them; and this was very likely the case with Otho and Miss Wynter.

“Here we are,” observed Otho, as they turned in at the Balder Hall Lodge, rode up to the door, and found that Miss Wynter was at home.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWENTY-EIGHT AND TWENTY-TWO.

MISS STRANGFORTH's butler threw open the door of an exquisite little upstairs sitting-room, and announced Otho and Eleanor. The latter, whose whole mind had been dwelling in anticipation on the meeting with this woman whom she disliked in advance, got a sort of jar through her nerves as, on walking into the room, she confronted, not only Magdalen luxuriously stretched in a low easy-chair by the fire, but, much more conspicuous at the moment, the figure of a man, standing on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire. A slight shock went through her as she encountered

the pair of grave and searching eyes which had been present in her mind more than once during the last twenty-four hours. It was Michael Langstroth who looked at her. Eleanor's first feeling was an unreasoning one of disappointment. "He comes to see her too, then." The next was one of satisfaction. "At any rate, I shall now learn who he is."

Then her attention was drawn to Magdalen, as the latter rose, with a slight "Ah!" and advanced, saying, "Well, Otho, how do you do?"

Eleanor looked at her. She had a rapid general impression of a tall woman, beautiful both in face and form, and arrayed in a mouse-coloured velvet gown—a woman whose exceedingly white and finely shaped hands held some brilliant scarlet wool and ivory knitting-needles; who had eyes which for darkness and coldness could not be surpassed, and a sweet and frigid smile.

"Well," Otho retorted, not very gaily;

“I’ve smashed through all etiquette and ceremony, I suppose, in doing this, and brought my sister to see you, instead of waiting for you to come and see her. Eleanor, this is my friend, Miss Wynter.”

He led his sister a little forward as he spoke, so that she was fully displayed to Magdalen’s view; and Miss Wynter’s eyes encountered a sight she did not often see—a woman as beautiful as herself, and possessing, too, the powerful advantage of being six years younger than she was. Her plain dark riding dress suited to admiration the frank and hardy youthfulness of the wearer; for with all her softness of voice and outline, and for all the rounded grace of her form, there was a hardness about Eleanor Askam which gave piquancy to her whole aspect.

“It was very good of you, Otho, and exceedingly good of you, Miss Askam. I was absolutely unable to go out this afternoon, and I wanted so much to make

your acquaintance." She extended her hand to Eleanor, and smiled her usual smile; one without any flavour of insincerity, or of sincerity either—a smile which repelled and displeased Eleanor, she knew not why.

"Otho seemed extremely anxious about it," she said coolly and gravely, "and I did what he wished me to do."

Her voice rang out, clear and distinct—no muffled notes, and no hesitation or pretence of being delighted to pay the visit. Magdalen noted it all, and replied sweetly—

"Yes; I am so glad you came. Take this easy-chair, and—— Oh, Michael, I beg your pardon." She slurred over an almost inaudible introduction.

"Miss Askam and I have met already," said Michael with composure. "I think I may safely claim the honour of having been before you in having made her acquaintance."

“No — how?” exclaimed Magdalen, arrested.

“Yes,” said Eleanor, looking at Michael as she seated herself. “I did not know who Mr.——”

“Langstroth,” said Michael, speaking for himself.

“Langstroth,” repeated Eleanor, with a little bow, “was; nor he who I was.”

“I beg your pardon. I read your name on the label that was on your bag,” he remarked; but he neither bowed nor smiled, though it would have been impossible to say that his manner was not polite. It was very much so, but not at all cordial.

“Mr. Langstroth saved me from getting out a station too soon,” she said, turning to Otho, in explanation. She could not help seeing that his moody countenance wore anything but one of its lighter expressions. He stood stiffly, his hat and whip in his hand, and a fleeting side-glance had shown

her that he and the stranger (was he any relation, she wondered, to Otho's great friend, Gilbert Langstroth, who was coming down for Christmas?) had exchanged a very slight and indifferent acknowledgment of each other's presence.

Michael Langstroth, now standing upright, looking on, betrayed no feeling of any kind as he heard her remark. It was five years now since he had had a letter from Magdalen, which had gone near to turning his brain. Such episodes have the effect upon those who receive them of, to use a vulgarism, killing or curing. Michael had been cured; hence his presence in Magdalen's boudoir now; hence his ability to stand by and take in the comedy of the situation, and to feel decidedly, if a little sardonically, amused at what was taking place.

He did not sit down again. He wished Magdalen good afternoon; and Eleanor noticed that, although polite—she had a

strong conviction that under no possible combination of circumstances could he be impolite—he was not what could be called genial. He was grave and distant, and however slight this gravity and distance, they were present, and Eleanor, keenly sensitive to manner and expression, noticed them instantly. Michael said he would call again in a few days, bowed to them all, and took his departure.

“Now, Otho,” said Miss Wynter, almost before Michael had left the room, “I have something to tell you. I had better do it now, before I forget. Briggs has got a very wonderful colt to show you, and has been expressing the most ardent longing——”

“Briggs—a colt!” exclaimed Otho, with unaffected interest and animation; “I’ll go to him this minute. I suppose he is at the stables?”

“I suppose so—somewhere there,” replied Magdalen nonchalantly; and Otho disappeared instantly, while Eleanor sat

still, feeling intensely displeased, less at what was actually said and done than at the tone and the manner of it. Fine-tempered and incapable of behaving with insolence or impertinence to any inferior, it yet seemed to her that Magdalen was scarcely in a position to order Otho to the stables, so that she might be left alone with his sister ; or, indeed, to call him by his Christian name, and almost openly to hint that she wanted him out of the way—unless, indeed, she were engaged to be married to him, which Eleanor, with a sudden sense of apprehension, hoped she was not ; and recalling Otho's dissertations on their ride hither, she felt it was scarcely possible that he could be.

While she was thinking these thoughts, and while the shadow of them was on her too expressive countenance, Magdalen sank back in her chair, watching her visitor keenly, if unobtrusively. When she addressed her, she spoke with a smile, but

her eyes, Eleanor noticed, did not in the least partake of the smile upon her lips. She smiled, not because she felt pleased, or genial, or mirthful, but mechanically—because it is the custom to smile when you receive your guests.

Eleanor, on her part, was conscious of liking less and less the aroma, as it were, of Miss Wynter and her surroundings; but she was aware that this was blind prejudice, and was determined to overcome it if she could. She was very young, and Otho had not been wrong when he had described her as enthusiastic; but she felt a kind of mental and moral chill, or ever she had really entered into conversation with this woman, who had, as it were, been so suddenly flung across her path, and who, she began to realize, must be a powerful influence in Otho's life. It must be so, she reflected, or he would not thus have been eager to bring them together, and then as eager to leave them

alone. Alone, for what? she reflected—to discover the innate and latent points of sympathy between them, and to rejoice in them, or to fight out their radical differences to the bitter end?

CHAPTER XIV.

THRUST AND PARRY.

"OF course you are quite strange to Bradstane?" began Magdalen.

"Yes, quite—at least, practically so. I can't recall much about it. In fact, I'm strange to the north altogether, except Scotland—staying at hotels or shooting-boxes, you know."

"Ah, yes. Those are luxuries for the rich," said Magdalen, whose whole person, attire, and surroundings breathed an atmosphere of more than riches, of extravagance. "I may say I have never been in the south, for I haven't, except to Bournemouth, with my aunt. Well, I wonder

how you will 'like,' as they say here. The society of Bradstane is a little peculiar. It is not intellectual"—Eleanor felt a little surprise at this; Magdalen herself had not struck her as looking intellectual—"and it is not by any means lively. And I suppose you have been accustomed to a good deal of variety in your life?"

"Not lately. Six months ago, my aunt, Mrs. Stanley, who has been my second mother, died very suddenly. We have had a very quiet and a very sad house ever since, and if Bradstane were ever so gay, I should not be going out much now."

"Ah, yes, very sad—Otho mentioned your loss," murmured Magdalen, who, with the self-absorption of her kind, had forgotten Eleanor's account of her uncle's condition.

"And then," added Eleanor, feeling her heart beating just a little faster, but marching straight into the fray, "I have

Otho. I hope to see something of him now. He is my only brother, and I have been much separated from him."

"Ah, your brother," said Magdalen, all at once discarding her purring tone, and taking up her knitting, with the expression of one who has just come to some mental decision. "He was the attraction, was he?"

"Hateful woman!" said Eleanor within herself. "She thinks he is her property, and that I am come to dispute him with her. So I have, and so I will." Then aloud, "Certainly, he was *an* attraction, if it needed a great attraction to make me wish to visit my own home, after so many years. Besides, who knows how long I may have the chance to be with him, and get to know him? I am astonished that he has not married before now."

A slight pause. Eleanor herself was surprised to find in what style she was talking; but something in the very pre-

sence of the other woman seemed to arouse her pugnacity, and to place her in an almost aggressive attitude.

“At any rate, while I have the field to myself, I mean to let Otho know that he has a sister,” she pursued, with a slight laugh.

“Highly commendable,” said Magdalen, either with constraint or a slight sneer ; it would have been difficult to say which.

“He is a great friend of yours, I find,” continued Eleanor, looking directly at Magdalen, who made no reply to the words. Eleanor paused a moment, and then took her course. She was really anxious to learn, if she could, the extent of this woman’s influence over her brother ; but more than that, to get to know whether she were a sincere woman, or a false one. She would feign a tender interest in Otho’s affairs, and a sisterly solicitude for his welfare. As a matter of fact, she knew nothing of the said affairs, nor whether

well or ill might be the word to apply to his spiritual condition. She would try to discover. It was a hardy resolution, with such a woman as Magdalen for her opponent, but want of courage was not one of Eleanor's defects.

"It seems so strange," she presently went on, in a musing tone, "that you, living in the same place and being his friend, must have seen him often, and know him quite well, while I, his own sister, scarcely know anything about him."

"You think that is a great loss, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, I do. I think I ought to know about him—good or bad. It seems to me unnatural that I should not. I wish you would tell me something about him, Miss Wynter. It really seems as though he had left us on purpose that we might discuss him."

"Why discuss him at all?"

"Well," said Eleanor with a smile, "I

don't think you and I can have many objects of mutual interest to talk about. Otho is one, obviously—my brother and your friend. I think it is most natural to talk about him. From what he said of you, I am sure you must know a great deal of his character and disposition. He is very reserved, I think. I want to get on with him, of course. Can't you tell me something of his tastes and habits ? ”

Miss Wynter's white eyelids drooped, but quivered not. Her fingers flew in and out of the scarlet wool, and the ivory needles made a pleasant, dull clicking. What she thought with cold annoyance was, that Eleanor was impertinent and inquisitive, devoid of tact and *savoir faire*. (No one knew better than Eleanor herself that her present conduct was scarcely conventional, but she felt that she did not much care what it was, so long as she rode away from Balder Hall possessed of definite views as to Magdalen's goodness

or badness, and she rather hoped the conversation would disclose badness.) If the young woman were put down at once and promptly, Magdalen argued, she might perhaps profit by the lesson; if not, if encouraged in the least, she was almost certain to become very troublesome. So she said—

“My dear child, you surely do not suppose that because a man comes once or twice a week and chats with one for an hour or two, or even spends a whole afternoon in one’s society, that he necessarily reveals to one anything of his real habits or character?”

“It depends on what his habits may be, of course,” said Eleanor with gravity; and, in spite of telling herself that she was acting a part, she felt a vague uneasiness, which vexed her like a coming trouble whenever any question arose of Otho and his doings. It was not the first time she had felt it. Dim reports of his fastness and

strange habits had penetrated even to her well-sheltered home with the Stanleys; and more than once her uncle had said to her, "My dear, I'm afraid your brother spends a good deal of money in a very reckless way."

"It depends on what his habits may be," she repeated; "but he could not come so often as that and not show something of his character—or disposition, perhaps I should say."

"Well, you will see him daily, now that you have come to live with him—possibly for many hours in each day. I see him, at the most, once or twice a week, for an hour, or perhaps two hours. It is obvious that your opportunities will be incomparably greater than mine have been. Don't you think you had better study his character at first hand—if you are interested in it, that is?"

"If I am interested—in my own brother?"

“I see you have very enthusiastic ideas, and quite orthodox ones, about brothers and sisters loving each other, however dissimilar in character and disposition they may be” (Eleanor repressed a smile. She had not expressed any such views), “just because they are brothers and sisters. But, you know, it is not wise to take your impressions of any one in whom you are interested from a third person. How can you know what feelings and what motives might influence me in speaking to you of him——”

“Oh, Miss Wynter, would Otho have brought me here if you had had a bad influence over him? He thinks so much of you,” said Eleanor, seeing that Magdalen had accepted her (Eleanor’s) presentation of herself, and feeling that her *rôle* was now an easy one to play.

“No,” pursued Miss Wynter, apparently unheeding Eleanor’s last remark; “study him and his character at your ease, by

yourself, and don't worry yourself about it. As for his habits—now, this advice really comes from my heart, Miss Askam,” and Magdalen laid down her work and looked with cold earnestness at her companion—“if he were younger than you, or in any way in your keeping or under your control, it would clearly be your duty to become acquainted with his incomings and outgoings, and to supervise his proceedings. But just the reverse is the case. He is older than you by several years; he is his own master, and has been so for many years, accustomed to consult himself alone—you little know how much himself alone—in the management of his own affairs. He knows his own aims and wishes, if he has any. Let me advise you, if you wish to have a shadow of influence over him, never to interfere, by word, look, or deed, with anything that he may choose to do. I do not say that by this course you will gain an influence over

him, but I say that if you do not observe it, you will lose every chance of ever gaining one. He will not brook the least appearance of meddling——”

“But, indeed, I do not want——” began Eleanor, astounded at the revelation her ruse had called forth—amazed at the depths of angry feeling which she saw quickly enough were surging under that composed exterior called Magdalen Wynter. But Magdalen had begun her exhortation, and was not to be easily stopped. In the same cold but energetic style she went on—

“If you once let him see that you think his affairs are anything to you, your chance is gone.”

“My chance—of what?” thought Eleanor, looking, as she now felt, very grave.

Magdalen saw this gravity. Her thought was, “Silly, sentimental creature! The idea of coming rushing in with a mission or a vocation to improve her

brother! Some women never will learn." Then, after a moment's pause, she continued—

"Men are odd, you know. If they do wrong, yes, even if they wrong you—if they do something flagrantly unjust, and you reproach them, or scold them, or try to make them see how bad they have been, what good does it do? It does not make them sorry or ashamed, but it makes them think you very disagreeable; it makes them angry with you for dictating to them; it makes them cease to have any wish to please you, or any regard for you. Let him alone, unless you wish to make mischief. You understand me, I dare say?"

"I'm afraid I understand that my brother's habits are not what they should be."

"That is a very hasty conclusion, and shows that you certainly have not understood me. If I must speak so very plainly——"

“ I do not wish to interfere with him,” said Eleanor, with a shade of hauteur ; but she was uneasy, and an anxious colour had begun to burn on either cheek. She had come hither against her will. She had disliked Magdalen from Otho’s talk of her, had disliked her more on seeing and conversing with her, and had descended to subterfuge, to find out her thoughts about her brother. She was pure of any wish to be a missionary to Otho, which was evidently what Magdalen had gathered to be her object ; but she had unwittingly called forth an indirect characterization of her brother—and that from one who evidently knew him well, and was tenacious of her hold on him—which roused her deepest uneasiness. After the last words there was a pause, and then Eleanor said slowly, and wishing the while that she had not begun the conversation—

“ And I have no doubt that you know far more about him than I do.”

"You credit me with a great deal of very important knowledge," said Magdalen, coldly and sweetly. "All I can say is, that if I possessed that knowledge to the full, I should not think of imparting it to you—not for a moment. And let me remind you that, whether he be good or bad, I am not your brother's keeper. I think he is quite competent to take care of himself."

"I was not dreaming of assuming any such office," Eleanor said, fully convinced from Magdalen's tone that she did feel herself to be Otho's keeper, in a sense; that she liked the proprietorship, and meant to fight for her possession of it, if it were disputed. The idea of entering the lists with her filled Eleanor with disgust. Her impressions, could she have reduced them to their simplest form, were that Otho was not what he ought to be in the matter of conduct, and that Magdalen knew a good deal more about him than

she chose to tell. Miss Wynter, however, seemed to consider the subject at an end, and to assume that Eleanor had found out her mistake. She herself began with a new subject.

“How came you to know Michael Langstroth?” she inquired, with her sweetest smile.

“Oh, I don’t consider that I know him. Did you not hear what I said to Otho? He got into the carriage I was in, at a station near Tebay. He seemed in a great hurry, and jumped in as the train was setting off——”

“Just like him!”

“A porter at Tebay had told me that the station after this one at which Mr. Langstroth got in would be Bradstane, so I was collecting my things, and I suppose he saw from that label on my bag where I was really going; for he said, ‘Are you getting out at Cotherstone?’ Then, of course, I explained, and he ex-

plained, and it was all right. He got out at Cotherstone, and I came on to Bradstane."

"Oh yes," said Magdalen, who had listened attentively, and watched no less attentively the manner and gestures of the speaker. "He has such long distances to go in a country place like this."

"Do they all call him 'Doctor' Langstroth, here?"

"Yes, they all do. It is a country habit. He 'doctors' them, so he is 'the doctor'; but he practises as a surgeon."

"Is he a friend of yours, then?"

"I have known him intimately for many years."

"Otho says that some one whom he called 'Gilbert Langstroth' is his greatest friend. Is he any relation of this Mr. Langstroth?"

"Brother."

"Indeed! But Otho seemed not to know Dr. Langstroth very well."

“ They are not devoted to each other.”

“ Have they quarrelled ? ”

It could hardly be that these questions of Eleanor's, put in all innocence and good faith, were agreeable to Magdalen. Perhaps, when she asked Otho to bring his sister soon, she had foreseen some such catechism. Perhaps she had reflected that the old facts of her engagement to Michael and its rupture, and the reasons assigned for it, must surely, sooner or later, come to Eleanor Askam's ears, since they were public property, and it was not the fashion in Bradstane to hide any treasure, however minute, of fact or fiction, gossip or scandal, which had once gained credence in the public mind. Why not, she may have reflected, let Eleanor hear the story from herself, and so at any rate gain that first hearing which is supposed to go such a long way towards deciding the final verdict ? She knew quite well that, along with the simple account of her own en-

gagement to Michael, and of its having been broken off, Eleanor would likewise hear that she, Magdalen, had jilted Michael, hoping to be married by Otho Askam. That, whether true or not, was what was said, and Magdalen knew it as well as if she had heard it herself. She knew, too, that women had laughed at her, and did laugh at her yet, because she had thrown Michael over, they said, and not secured Otho. People did not say those things to her, of course, but she knew that they were said, and that they would be said to Eleanor. Grievous though the questions of the latter might appear to her, therefore, it might have been still more grievous to know that Eleanor was seated in other drawing-rooms, hearing other versions of the story.

“Oh, it is a long tale, rather,” said she; and she related correctly enough the history of the two brothers, not mentioning her own relations to Michael, but watching

Eleanor with interest. She saw how the girl's eyes gradually kindled, and her lips parted, as she heard, and seemed almost to foresee the end of the tale. She leaned forward eagerly as Magdalen wound up with the story of the will and its directions, and how Michael had received the blow.

"Yes?" said Eleanor.

"When he found that his father's house was all that belonged to him, the first thing he did was to turn Gilbert out of it, calling him traitor, and saying he had lost his brother. He drove him out that instant, you know, on the spot."

"He was right," exclaimed Eleanor, in a deep voice, which showed how great had been her interest and her suspense; and as she spoke, she struck her riding whip emphatically across her left hand, and looked up with a frown. "I would have done the same. Cowardly, snake-like traitor!" The instinct of the fighting

animal was strong in Eleanor, as it is in most healthy creatures.

“You think so? A great many other persons thought the same; and a great lawyer, a friend of Michael’s, wanted him to dispute the will.”

“And did he?”

“Michael dispute it! My dear Miss Askam, he is far too haughty and high-flown to descend to any such mundane method of settling the matter. He said he washed his hands of it, and left his brother Gilbert to his conscience. He refused to touch any of the sum which was left him—or rather, to Gilbert, to manage for him. He said he had a profession which would keep him from starvation, and a roof to cover him—he would have no more.”

“I agree with him,” said Eleanor, still very emphatically; and she lifted her eyes, filled with the feeling that was in her, and her whole countenance brightened with an

ennobling light, the result of inner exaltation, and as Magdalen met this gaze, her own eyes dilated, a look of something like affright crossed his face ; she said quickly and coldly—

“ It sounds very well—very grand, does it not ? Quite heroic, in fact.”

“ I think it was very fine—very high.”

“ It sounds so, and it was so, in a way. But when one comes down to the dull regions of common sense, as one always has to do in the end, it does not work very well. For instance, that high resolution that you admire so much was the rock that Michael and I split upon.”

“ Michael—and you,” repeated Eleanor mechanically, looking at Magdalen with a new expression, and with all the glow fading from her eyes.

“ Yes, exactly. When Mr. Langstroth died, his son and I had been engaged three years. We had always looked forward to being married—at least, I had—when our

prospects improved. But when all this came out, and it was evident that Michael would have no assistance, and even refused what he might have had, there was an end to all that, of course. He was not well off. He never will be. He has not the spirit of—I won't say money-making, but of the most ordinary providence for the future. When he refused the provision that had been made for him, I knew that meant that I must give him up, and I did so. We have only been friends ever since, and——”

“You gave him up, then—oh, Miss Wynter, how could you?” Eleanor had exclaimed, before she knew what she was saying. The next moment she felt that she had committed an indiscretion, but she scarcely improved the situation by hastily exclaiming, “Oh, I beg your pardon!”

“There is no need,” said Magdalen, quite composedly. “One cannot enter into the details of such things with

strangers. I acted, as I thought, for the best. Poor Michael! He is such a fine fellow in some ways, but so utterly, so hopelessly unpractical. He is not fit for his position, or for the present age; and yet he is so loyal, so true. I do not believe he ever cared, or ever will care, for any woman but me," she added, looking pensively at Eleanor as she spoke. "That sounds rather a self-confident thing to say, does it not? but I have known him so long—I have good grounds for thinking that I am right. He is not like those men who love here a day, and there a day, and another day somewhere else. . . . Poor Michael!"

While she spoke, Eleanor felt her heart as heavy as lead within her. If Magdalen Wynter and Gilbert Langstroth were Otho's friends, and beloved of him, and this other man was shut out and disliked—yes, her idea that Magdalen knew more about Otho than she would say must be

correct, and it seemed as if the whole thing were painful and discordant. But she supposed Miss Wynter must possess unusual powers of fascination, since Michael, after being treated by her in a manner which even her representations could not make to appear creditable, remained her friend. Had he not been seated there when they arrived?

Pondering painfully on this problem, she was roused by the opening of the parlour door, and looked up quickly, in the hope that it might be Otho, and that they would soon escape from this room, which had become a place that oppressed her.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.





UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 045844062